THE THEORY OF PRAYER

REV. W. H. KARSLAKE.

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THEORY OF PRAYER:

With Special Reference to

MODERN THOUGHT.

BY THE

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LONDON:

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE COMMITTEE OF THE
SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE;

SOLD AT THE DEPOSITORIES:
77, GREAT QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS
4, ROYAL EXCHANGE; 48, PICCADILLY;
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1873.

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PRAYER AND MODERN THOUGHT.

CHAPTER I.

QUESTIONS AS TO THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

The condition of men's minds on the subject of prayer seems to be an unsettled and divided one. On the one hand there exists a very widely-spread feeling of uncertainty as to the direct, positive power of prayer, which some who hold a leading position in other spheres of thought, and whose opinions claim respectful consideration, entertain strongly and express with force. On the other hand, at times, under the pressure of some great national or individual need, the doubts which floated on the surface of men's minds vanish for the time, swept away by the strong, deep tide of religious feeling which carries away the spirit with an almost irresistible force in earnest

prayer to God. It was so remarkably of late, when all classes of the nation united in constant, fervent prayer to the Almighty that the life of the Prince of Wales might be spared. And, similarly, there come times when some of those who have through life neglected prayer, or denied its efficacy, are brought to long ardently for a living belief in its influence, the thought of which somehow forces itself upon them at the last; and for power to lift up their spirits with loving, child-like confidence to God in prayer. And this shows a still more deep, generally-prevailing sentiment (so to call it at present) as to the power of prayer. But these occasional strong outbursts of feeling cannot in themselves, it may be fairly urged, prove the efficacy of prayer, or, indeed, any surely-grounded belief in it. They prove only, it may be contended, the strong pressure of a national or individual sense of danger and need. And it may be argued that this pressure does not so much sweep away obstacles, and give free play to deep-rooted instincts of reliance on the power of prayer, but rather drives men to have recourse to all means, however futile; especially when, in the extremity of danger, or under the influence of pain or approaching dissolution, the regulating forces

of the mind have become impaired. Granted, that a united nation poured forth its earnest supplication to God; granted, that the event so fervently desired, so heartily sought for, did take place; still the sceptic may argue that there is no consequential relation, at least no *proved* relation, between the event and the prayer. The prayer went before: the event followed. And this, he may contend, is the only known connexion between the two. The idea of their relation, he may say, as cause and effect, antecedent and consequent, may be a delusion; certainly is not, and cannot be, *proved*.

And thus the whole question opens out before us as to the efficacy of prayer. What exactly, we try to think, is the meaning of prayer, and the view taken of the course of the world by those who believe that it is affected by prayer? What kind of proof is possible, on either side of the question, as to whether prayer has or has not power to influence the course of things on the earth? What are the chief difficulties, existing in men's minds in a more or less definite form, which cause them to doubt or absolutely reject the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer?

Now, as to the first point, the general view involved in the idea of prayer is this: It sup-

poses the world to be governed indeed by fixed laws imposed upon it by the will of its Almighty Creator from the first; but it conceives that He reserves to Himself the right of interposing His power into the order of the universe in such ways and at such times as He may think fit. It regards Him as not having made the universe once for all, and then retired absolutely from its control, leaving cause and effect, antecedent and consequent, to work on uninterruptedly in the world of outward nature and man's social and moral life till the end of time; but as exercising over it His controlling providence, maintaining it in existence from moment to moment by His power, directing the course of events according to His will, yet so as practically to preserve inviolable the action of those laws which He, for most wise and beneficent purposes, has ordained. This is involved in the idea of the efficacy of prayer. And, further, it involves the supposition that in this His direction of the world, He is, in some degree, influenced by the desires and requests of mankind on earth; that, as an earthly parent is moved by the petitions of his children, over and above his knowledge of their interests and needs, so God too, the Heavenly Father of mankind at large, wills to

be addressed by us, and suffers Himself to be moved by our prayers. And the question arises, Is there really good ground for this belief in prayer? or are there, on the contrary, such strong objections to be raised to the belief as tend to show that it is but a human invention, a transfer of what holds among men to our anthropomorphic conception of God?

Then, as to the second point, it is most important to observe that this supposed interposition of God in the affairs of the world is a matter of which it is absolutely impossible to give natural (as opposed to supernatural) proof. That which is quite possible in the sphere of outward nature, where strict inference, based on the experimental methods of inductive science, can be applied to the exact observation of sensible facts; that which is possible only with a modified degree of certainty in cases of social and political science, where the facts do not admit of being decomposed and analyzed as the facts of physical science do—is quite out of the question here. We cannot prove the relation of cause and effect here. We cannot penetrate the secrets of the invisible world for ourselves. We can see that certain effects are produced; that a danger, e. g. is escaped, a sickness healed. And we may know

that this very thing was the object of the prayers of others or of our own. But we cannot *prove*, by any natural proof, that the danger was averted, the sickness cured, by any direct interposition of God; or that His interposition (if there was such) was drawn forth by our prayers. But then it is well to understand at the outset that such proof is impossible from the very nature of the case. Proof in each subject must be sought according to the nature of the thing to be proved. And here we are dealing with the things of the unseen spiritual world; and these transcend the observation which is applicable to matters of sense alone. The only possible proof of things above nature is the supernatural revelation of them to us by the Beings of the higher world from which they proceed. The testimony of God to it is the only possible absolute proof of the efficacy of prayer. And thus, it must be clearly understood, we are precluded here from all consideration of the only positive proof which can be given of it. For we are to examine the subject from the point of view of one who would not admit the authority of Revelation, or, at least, would set it aside for the time. We are to set forth, from the point of view of an unbeliever or a doubter, the difficulties as to the

efficacy of prayer as fully and fairly as we can; and then consider, still from the point of view of an unbeliever or a doubter, how far those difficulties may be fairly met. The aspect in which the question is to be regarded by us is this: Granted, that men do feel something within them—whether it proceeds from natural instinct, or is the result of education, matters not now—impelling them to offer up their prayers to God. Is this a mere delusion? Is there anything which can be brought forward to show convincingly that it is no right, deep-seated principle of life; that men are in error in believing that the great Author of the world, and of man, the highest rational portion of it, can, and does, listen to and answer their prayers, even as a father is moved by the prayers of his children, consistently with the Nature of His own Being, and the Laws which He has imposed upon the world which He has made?

It is, accordingly, with the *difficulties* raised to the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer that we must be mainly occupied here. We are not to consider what positive ground there is from Scripture for maintaining the power of prayer; but what weight there is in the difficulties brought forward on grounds of reason against it. Is it *unreasonable,* on natural grounds, for

men to pray? To have sought out the difficulties here and set them in a clear light, and disentangled them (as far as may be) from the mass of irrelevant matter in which they are not uncommonly involved, and then weighed them fairly and exactly in the balance, as far as we can, will have been by no means an unprofitable task. It is well in this, as in other matters, to meet our difficulties full in the face. It is the fancied terrors of the darkness which most appal us. The dim, shadowy apparitions, which the imagination creates in times of doubt and anxiety, vanish when the full light is poured in, and the objects which gave rise to them are seen as they truly are. And it will be the object, accordingly, of the following pages to state as fairly and fully as possible the difficulties which are felt on the subject of the efficacy of prayer. And if it should be found that those difficulties, when set forth fully and candidly examined, lose their force in great measure, or are seen to be counterbalanced by much which makes in favour of the value of prayer, for those who will approach the subject in a fair spirit and an unbiassed mind, then the way will be cleared for the acceptance of that belief in the power of prayer to which we are impelled by

the deep-rooted instincts of our nature, as we believe them to be, and which is confirmed and enforced (for those who will accept its authority) in (it may almost be said without exaggeration) every part of the Book of the Word of God.

The subject, it must be added, is by no means an indifferent one, a matter for mere curiosity or abstract speculation. It enters most deeply into all the elements of our life. It may, indeed, be an error to think that the course of events *can be* influenced by our prayers. But the error is, comparatively speaking, a mere harmless delusion, at the worst. It may draw forth a sneer at the folly of the multitude from the profounder intellects of the time. It can hardly produce any greater ill. But, on the contrary, if it be an error to maintain that prayer *cannot* be availing; that all proceeds in fixed, undeviating order, on which it is mere delusion to think that any influence can be exercised by man's prayer—then how immeasurable is the loss of those who cut themselves off from this advantage! how deep the injury inflicted on their race by those who, in the vanity of imagined superiority in wisdom, would lightly deprive them of this, their one—if it be so—most precious, most prevailing resource!

And more than this: if prayer be, as many

feel it to be, the very breath of the spirit's life, the power which regulates and maintains in action the other forces of the soul, and if the vigour of it be the best evidence of the existence in the soul of spiritual life, which consists in the conscious communion of man's spirit on earth with God in heaven, and the desire to live with Him in love—then all that weakens or disturbs the soul's confidence in prayer impairs or agitates the energy of the spirit's life; all that tends to destroy entirely man's trust in the efficacy of prayer goes, so far, to poison the very springs of his spiritual being, and numb the vigour of his higher life.

And thus, while other questions and difficulties do but attack the outworks—perhaps only *seem* to attack the outworks—of Christian Faith, the denial of the efficacy of prayer undermines utterly the whole fabric of belief. Next to the denial of the existence of a God at all, at least as known to us, comes the denial of the reasonableness of communion with Him on the part of man. And thus, with belief in the power of prayer must fall, not only Revelation, which throughout inculcates the duty, or rather, we should say, declares the privilege, of prayer; not only belief in the Divine Being and the teaching of Christ, Who

even dictated to His disciples His perfect form of prayer to be used by His followers in all after-times, and set them an example of a life of prayer; but also all that trustful delight in communion with a Higher Being, all that reliance on Him as the source of temporal and spiritual help in life, which constitutes in men at large one of the first and fundamental articles of religious belief; all conscious spiritual union, in short, of man with God. So great are the issues which hang on the question of the efficacy of prayer.

CHAPTER II.

PRAYER IN RELATION TO THE FIXED ORDER OF NATURE.

The first and great difficulty with regard to the efficacy of prayer arises from this, that it appears to conflict with that fixed order of nature which everywhere appears. Looking out upon the world, we see it, for most wise and beneficent purposes which we can, in some measure, trace, arranged as one great well-ordered kingdom in which law reigns supreme. Cause produces effect, consequent follows on antecedent, with undeviating regularity. Day and night, summer and winter, follow one another in regular course. Industry brings with it its natural fruits. Mental activity, cultivated and trained, works out its fresh truths, and contributes to the intellectual wealth of mankind. Watch the course of the world for a single day: see how everything can be traced (so far as we are able to penetrate into

the secrets of nature) to the action of causes producing it, which causes are themselves the effects of higher causes from which they spring; and say what room is there in all this fixed order for that constant interposition of a higher Power, which is supposed in the doctrine that the course of the world is influenced by man's prayer.

Somewhat of this kind is the tone of mind which finds a difficulty in reconciling the fixed order of nature everywhere observed with the supposed doctrine of the efficacy of prayer. And the difficulty is strengthened by the fact that this fixity of the order of nature appears more and more, the more science is able to extend its researches, and ascertain the laws which regulate the course of things. True, it may be said, we cannot follow the chain of causation far; we can only go a few steps in tracing effects up to their causes, and those causes themselves as effects to higher causes still. But, so far as we *can* go, all does appear ordered according to fixed laws. Chance is practically eliminated from the universe. Every thing leads us to suppose that, where law is not ascertained, it is our knowledge only which is at fault; that in the physical world certainly, perhaps to a great extent in the course of social

and political events too, all might be traced, did our range of knowledge allow it, to the action of fixed laws. And where, in this fixed order, is the room for answers to prayer?

And what confirms this view of the difficulty is, that men, even with the strongest belief in the efficacy of prayer, do not think of praying for that which they know to be absolutely fixed. No one prays that the sun may not rise on the morrow. No one asks that the dead may be restored to life. Even where death has not actually taken place, but yet seems approaching inevitably, according to the uniform laws which regulate the course of disease, we do not ask that the action of those fixed laws may be interfered with, their course supernaturally arrested, and the issue stayed. Is it, then, anything but ignorance of these fixed laws in certain cases which gives scope for the belief in prayer? When we pray that some danger may be averted, some sickness healed, is it anything but ignorance of the chain of causation by which the effect is to be produced which leads us to make the object desired the matter of our request, and then to attribute the effect produced to the direct response of an invisible agent to our prayer?

These difficulties I have tried to put forth in the fullest and fairest way. Perhaps to some it may seem as if they were set out too minutely and given an undue weight. But it is only right in candour to try to place in the clearest light we can the view of another from whom we dissent ourselves.

There is a striking passage in the writings of Dr. Chalmers which puts very forcibly the difficulties here stated respecting prayer:—

"Prayer," he writes, "and the answer of prayer—according to the popular, and we shall even say the natural understanding—are simply the preferring of a request to another. Man applies, God complies. Man asks a favour, God bestows it. These are conceived to be the two terms of a real interchange that takes place between the parties—the two terms of a sequence, in fact, whereof the antecedent is a prayer lifted up from earth, and the consequent is the fulfilment of that prayer in virtue of a mandate from heaven.

"We must not disguise it, that this view of prayer is the object of a strong philosophical antipathy, as implying a perpetual invasion on those established and general laws of nature which are conceived to be unchangeable. It is painfully offensive to a mind habituated to

the investigation of causes to admit of any fitful or capricious deviation from the march and regularity of those magnificent progressions which in its view compose the history of our universe. It cannot bear that the certainties of nature and of science should be so intermeddled with; and grievously would it mar the luxury of many a philosophic contemplation if, instead of a universe whose efficient principles gave birth to their respective trains of subordinate and strictly dependent phenomena, and whose phenomena could all be traced to the operation of fixed and invariable principles, the harmonies of so noble a mechanism were to be thwarted at every turn by the power which lay in the inclinations of man to call forth, through that efficacy which is ascribed to prayer, the special interventions of the Deity. There is no conception which so adheres to the mind of a philosopher as the unaltered, if not the unalterable constancy of nature—or, in other words, the invariableness of that order where, by a process sure as necessity itself, the same antecedents are followed up by the same consequents. He cannot give place in his creed to the efficacy of specific prayer, because he never has observed, and he scarcely can imagine, that the firm concatena-

tion of nature's sequences is in any instance broken. He will acquiesce in the doctrine of a general providence, if by this be meant the primary institution of a great mundane system left henceforward to its own evolutions. He will even acquiesce in the significancy of prayer, if by this be meant the homage of our expressed dependence, or if uttered for the sake of a reflex influence on the mind of the petitioner, and not for the sake of a direct influence on the mind of the Divinity. But prayer, in the obvious sense of it, as a thing of asking on the one side and of receiving upon the other:—prayer, as invested with a controlling force over the processes of nature and history:—prayer, as an engine by which to shift or to modify the succession of events:—this were disturbing, it is felt, the regularities of the visible creation; and it is a feeling which gives painful disturbance to the enamoured student of these regularities. It is resented as a sort of breach or violence on all that is wont to regale his imagination and intellect; and thus, amongst the disciples of modern science, amongst physical inquirers—and that whether into the physics of matter or the physics of the mind—it is in dissonance with all their habits of conception when told either of the

doctrine of a special providence or of the efficacy of prayer[1]."

And now, admitting to the full all that can be said as to the fixity of the order of nature, I would say that there is another element which has to be introduced, another aspect in which the course of the universe has to be viewed. For take into consideration the position of man in nature; and all is changed. There already *is* introduced a disturbing element into the midst of the fixed order of the world. And it is, probably, owing simply to our perfect familiarity with the fact, that we overlook the continual interference with the order of nature which is produced by man, and fail to observe the possibility, as an indisputable truth, of the existence of an order in nature compatible with the constant interference with that order which issues from the action of man's will. The simplest and most homely instances are, perhaps, the most suitable for illustration of what is meant. The law of water is, that it should flow downwards and find its own level; and the stream flows onward in accordance with its fixed law. Yet the child can, at its will, check the course of the stream at any

[1] Dr. Chalmers, vol. v. pp. 436–438.

particular point by the simple act of putting its hand into the water as it flows; and the man can put obstacles in the way, and, so far, absolutely stay its course. The law of the stone is to tend downwards towards the centre of gravity in the earth. Yet man's will can so far counteract this tendency as to throw the stone upwards; the law of gravitation, it is to be observed, remaining the fixed law none the less. An accident which one meets with causes the blood to flow in a manner which must eventually bring death, according to the action of natural laws. But to meet his needs, the physician's aid is sought; and, by the remedies which he applies, the flow of the blood is staunched and the evil stayed. And here again the natural working of cause and effect is interfered with, by reason of this, that man becomes a fresh and independent cause. And yet there is no violation of the law, but only the application of counteracting agencies, bringing about a different result from that which would have followed had the first antecedent continued to act alone. There is no introduction of anarchy; no interruption of the reign of law.

And it seems almost inconceivable that any —looking on the fact that man is thus an in-

dependent cause in the universe, empowered to bring about the results which he desires, not, indeed, in contravention of the established laws of nature, but yet by an interference in accordance with law—should deny the possibility of an interposition on the part of a Supreme Being in a similar, though in a far higher and fuller, way. Granted, that there is a Divine Creator by Whom our world was made, shall we suppose that He has denied to Himself that power which yet, as we see as a fact, He has delegated to man? Shall we be guilty of the absurdity of supposing that the Almighty Being, with His infinite wisdom and absolute power, cannot do that which man, with his limited capability, his slight knowledge, is yet able to perform? Man does, as a fact, prevent or bring about a calamity in some cases; he can, in particular instances, check the course of a disease. Can it be imagined that God cannot, at His will, send on a nation a famine, pestilence, or war, or avert the evil when it is drawing near; that He cannot so order the course of things as to turn away the disease which threatens destruction, in answer, if it be so, to man's prayer?

And thus gradually the whole view which we take of the course of the world becomes

changed. From looking on the world as proceeding in one great chain of cause and effect, in which all things follow one another in fixed, unalterable course, we are led, reversely, to doubt whether there be any such thing as causation in the sequence of things, in itself, at all; whether the very idea of cause be not derived from the agency of man as the representative of God in this part of the universe; so that we should think of God alone as the One true ultimate Cause of all. Whether the idea of cause be a primary intuition of the mind itself, is a metaphysical problem with which we are not concerned here. But whether it be derived from external things, or only elicited and developed in the mind through them, there is nothing to suggest the idea in the simple sequence of events in the world. It can only be suggested, we think, by that originating power which man finds, experimentally, in himself, and which he then transfers, as it were, from himself to those external agencies through the action of which those results which he desires to effect are produced. Man wishes to make water boil; he gives to the heat through which the result is produced, in that aspect of it, the name of "cause." He connects the ice with the cold which accom-

panies its production, and he describes cold as the "cause" of ice. And thus, instead of there being a fixed, unalterable order of cause and effect in the world, with which nothing can be supposed to interfere, it is from the very fact of there being such interference that the idea of causation as pervading the world of nature is derived. Cause is, in fact, really the correlative of will.

And then, from this view of man, thus able, as a fact, so far to interfere with the course of nature as to apply its forces for the production of ends which he desires to gain—the action of those forces themselves remaining regulated by fixed law; nay, through the very fact of their being fixed, which enables him to ascertain them and apply them, more or less, at his will, and that with a wider and wider range, as science continually lays open fresh laws to man's view,—the mind rises up to the thought of that One far Higher Being from Whom come both man and the system of nature in the midst of which man is placed. And we think of the great Lord of the Universe, not as withdrawn from all care of the world which He has made—not as having established once for all a succession of events—not as having infused a sort of vital power into its agencies,

and then left it to run its course and follow its own inevitable destiny by itself—but rather as watching over and regulating the events of His world. We think of Him as holding in His hand the highest links, as it were, in the chain of causation, maintaining the world in being from hour to hour, and able at any moment to put an end to its existence by recalling that mysterious sustaining force which permeates every part of it; and as so influencing the application of the laws which He has assigned to it, as to bring about the results which He wills to produce, the action of the laws themselves remaining for the most part, if not absolutely, unchanged[2]. And, as

[2] The words of the eloquent writer before quoted set forward this point also very forcibly:—"God hath in wisdom ordained a regimen of general laws; and, that man might gather from the memory of the past those lessons of observation which serve for the guidance of the future, He hath enacted that all those successions shall be invariable which have their place and their fulfilment within the world of sensible experience. Yet God has not on that account made the world independent of Himself. He keeps a perpetual hold on all its events and processes notwithstanding. He does not dissever Himself for a single instant from the government and the guardianship of His own universe, and can adapt the forthgoings of His power to all the wants and all the prayers of His dependent family. For this purpose He does not need to stretch forth His hand on the inferior and visible links of any

if to give a simple practical illustration of His manner of dealing with His world, of a kind easily understood by those who are not capable of examining with subtlety the compatibility of His action with the ascertained existence of a fixed order in nature, and the other difficulties with which the subject, philosophically considered, is beset, He has given to man, within certain limits, the same power which He can put forth Himself, subject only to the limitations of His own perfect Will, of using the agencies of nature as causes, so to call them, through which to produce the results which he desires; God Himself being, with man under Him as His vicegerent in nature, the one true Cause of all[3]. And, therefore, it is only think-

progression, so as to shift the known successions of experience, or at all to intermeddle with the lessons and the laws of this great schoolmaster. He may work in secret and yet perform all His pleasure, not by the achievement of a miracle upon nature's open platform, but by the touch of one or other of those master-springs which lie within the recesses of her inner laboratory. There, and at His place of supernal command, by the fountain-head of influence, He can turn whithersoever He will the machinery of our world, without the possibility by human eye of detecting the least infringement upon any of its processes, at once upholding the regularity of visible nature and the supremacy of nature's invisible God." (Dr. Chalmers, Works, vol. iii. p. 624.)

[3] The argument here given has been stated very shortly

ing of God as doing in a far higher degree that which in a limited way He allows man to do *as a fact*, when we conceive of Him as influencing the course of events in answer to man's prayer.

in a periodical paper in answer to some objections raised to the doctrine of prayer. It will be found quoted in p. 29 of the author's short "Treatise on the Efficacy Prayer," published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

CHAPTER III.

PRAYER IN RELATION TO MIRACLES.

The question of the relation of prayer to miracles—the question, in other words, whether miracles can be looked for in answer to prayer—does not strictly belong to the inquiry as to the efficacy of prayer at large. It stands at the junction point of two other independent questions. One, as to the nature of miracles, and their limits, and the grounds on which the belief in them is maintained—a question which has been discussed in another volume of the series to which this present treatise belongs. And the other, as to whether it is conceivable that God should interpose at all in answer to prayer in the fixed order of nature established by Him in our world—a subject examined in the preceding chapter. Granted, that miracles can be conceived possible under certain circumstances and within certain

limits:—granted also, that we can suppose God may—nay, that it is difficult to suppose He should not—interpose in the events of the world which He has made, and which is sustained from moment to moment by Him, at the prayer of man—and the question as to the possibility of God's miraculous interposition in answer to man's prayer is solved. On the other hand, given the impossibility of miraculous intervention, or of intervention in the fixed order of the world at all; and all possibility of miracles in answer to prayer is disproved.

But the difficulty as to the relation of miracles to prayer assumes this particular form. We never pray, it is contended, (as was said in the last chapter,) that the sun should not rise on the morrow. We never pray that one who is dead should be restored to life; or that one who is sick of a disease incurable (according to the established order of nature) should be restored to health. "The most devout believer in prayer would never," it is said, "in our day, dream of praying that the sun should be arrested in its course, though the fate of all that was dearest to him on earth depended on the prolongation of the day or night. The habitual and life-long expe-

rience of the invariable order of the sun's course would be too strong, and the consequent perception of the magnitude of the miracle required to change it too vivid, to allow the idea of praying for it even to enter the mind." And by this, it is argued, the validity of our belief in the efficacy of prayer is disproved. "It is clear," the same writer continues, "that in every case where the same certainty of experience existed, the same sense of the inutility of prayer would follow; and that the only real difference between the scientifically educated and the uneducated mind in this matter is, the extent of the range of the phenomena in which they feel respectively the immutability of natural order." In other words, if God interposed at all, it may be thought, in the order of events, at the request of man, He might equally interpose, in His Almighty power, in a supernatural, as in a natural way. Therefore, the fact that we do not ask Him to interpose in a supernatural way, as being assured that such request would be in vain, indicates that prayer is a delusion, since it can only be employed in those cases where natural causes may equally well be regarded as producing the result which we attribute to God's interposition in answer to our

prayer. And our ignorance, it is urged, helps on the delusion. Did we know the cause which produced the effect, we should attribute the result to that cause, and not to God. Not knowing the cause, we assign the result to God's interposition on our behalf. Being ignorant how a cure is wrought, we attribute it to the exercise of God's power in love. Did we know the medicine, whose healing properties had caused it, we should refer the cure to the medicine, not to God. Ignorance, therefore, becomes the measure of our belief in the efficacy of prayer. And with our scientific progress in the discovery of the laws of the universe must wane correspondently our child-like belief in the interposition of God in our behalf.

Now the whole of this argument, forcible as it may, at first sight, appear, turns upon a simple, but entire misstatement, or misapprehension, as to the grounds on which we do not venture to ask of God to interfere with the order of things in a miraculous way. It is not in the least from any doubt as to His power to interfere, should it please Him to do so, in a miraculous manner in answer to our prayers. It does not rest, in the slightest degree, on a delusion as to God's interposi-

tion, in ordinary cases, in a natural way. It flows simply from this, that we feel we may not rightly ask of God to interfere with that which we see to be fixed according to His will. Whether He may, under special circumstances, and within certain limits, be pleased to alter even the established order of the world, for His own higher purposes, in what we commonly speak of as a *miraculous* way; what does exactly constitute a miracle, and how far even it may be due, not to any violation of established laws, but to the introduction of higher laws, by which their ordinary action is overruled—these are points which it does not belong to us to discuss here. Though it may be suggested in passing, that possibly the very fixity of the order of nature, which is supposed to render miracles impossible, may be ordained for this reason, among others—to make miracles possible, in order to give the only possible outward evidence of Divine authority, and afford credentials to a messenger from God. Were the order of nature not fixed as it is, there could be no occasional interruption of that fixed order to be observed. And, apart from this, there would be no outward sensible proof possible, so far as we know, to assure us that one came to our world with direct illumi-

nation from God. Miracles and prophecy—i. e. supernatural power in deed and word—are the outward evidences of the faith. And these imply and require the establishment of a fixed order with which they are contrasted. The unusual involves the usual course. The supernatural would not be observed, unless the order of nature were fixed.

But all we are concerned with here is this: that we do see, in great measure, an established order of nature, proving to us by its very existence that it is God's will that it should be so. And with that order we do not ask of Him therefore to interfere, under ordinary circumstances, simply as believing that we should not be asking for that which is in accordance with His perfect Will. We see that the sun always does rise according to a fixed course in nature. We know that those once dead do not return to life again. We believe these things, then, to be fixed. And, therefore, we do not ask of God that the sun should not rise on the morrow, or that the loved one who is gone should be restored to life. But it is not from a moment's doubt of God's power to interfere. We believe that one day the sun will cease to shine, and that all who are dead will hereafter be recalled to a new life. It is our conviction as to God's

will, not any doubt as to His power, or His willingness in itself to listen to our petitions, which sets the limit to what we ask of Him in prayer.

And with regard to that which is brought forward further in favour of the view that our not asking for what would be miraculous proves the invalidity of prayer, it too is wholly without weight. For when it is argued that even in those cases where the event seems contingent or uncertain, and not fixed according to an ordinarily unalterable law, we only refer the result to God's interposition where we cannot trace the natural cause; and that this ignorance is at the root of our confidence in prayer;—this is an error throughout. We may quite attribute a cure to certain medicines prescribed, and yet believe that it may have been owing to the prevailing influence of prayer that the medicine was given which, in a natural way, wrought the cure. We can attribute the deliverance of a vessel from shipwreck to the change of wind which aided the vessel or allayed the storm; and yet equally believe that the causes which brought about its deliverance were set in motion by the interposition of God. It may well be, to refer to the well-known saying, that a change of weather cannot come unless the wind blows from a

different quarter. But who can say how the wind, which "bloweth where it listeth," may be made to blow in one direction rather than in another; what agencies may be set to work in that wide region of the physical universe which lies beyond our ken, and so the desired result in the change of weather be produced; and this in answer to prayer? We may assign to physical causes, or to human efforts, the manes by which a pestilence has been staved off or removed, and at the same time look to God as the Cause of those physical agencies being set in motion, or those human efforts put forth. It is in no way the truth that we assign to God's interposition those effects only of which we are unable to trace the proximate cause. Where it may be that the interposition of a higher Power may be introduced, we cannot tell. In attempting to follow the chain of causation we can, in fact, go but a little way at most. We may know that disease is the result of a certain condition of the atmosphere as a proximate cause; we may be able to refer that condition of the atmosphere to some further cause of which it is itself the effect. But we can go only a short way in tracing thus the links of the chain. And we are wholly in the dark, therefore, as to *where* and in *what way* the action of a certain

agency may have been introduced so as to produce among us, if it be so, some evil as a chastisement, or to remove some trouble and confer some blessing, in answer to prayer. Were the light of science so strong as to light up for us the secrets of nature, and show us the whole chain of cause and effect, of which we now see at most only some few links at the lower end of the chain, it could but lead us up at last to the one great Cause; and the last visible effect would then be the result of His will, if viewed in the ultimate source in which it took its rise. So certainly is it not owing to our being ignorant of the causes from which effects are produced that we attribute them to Divine interposition in answer to prayer.

That they *are* the result of Divine interposition, or that that interposition, if there be such, *is* granted in answer to our prayer, are points which our argument here in no way endeavours to prove. All that is shown, or that we attempt to show, is, first, that no conclusion against the validity of prayer and the possibility of Divine interposition can be drawn from the fact that we do not venture to make that which requires a miracle for its accomplishment the object of our prayers; and, secondly, that there is no truth whatever in

the view that we refer those results only to Divine interposition of which we cannot trace the proximate cause; that, in fact, the pious mind does but refer to God what the ignorant attribute to chance, and the scientific understanding assigns to some fixed, though at present unknown, law. Such a view is altogether an untrue account of a believer's trust in the power of prayer. He believes, I conceive, quite as much that those effects are produced through Divine interposition of which the direct causes can be traced; though where and in what way (as was said before) agencies are introduced into a chain of causation, through which the result is brought about, is a point which he does not profess to be able to show. But still, if all the steps could be traced, they would probably, he believes, but lead up to the one great Cause to whose interposition the result is due. A. has been suffering under a severe sickness. His recovery he attributes to the instrumentality of B., though he assigns a certain medicine as the immediate cause of his cure. Could he trace all the steps through which his admission of his pain to B., or to some one who communicated it to B., led to the physician being sent and the remedy applied, he would not one whit the

less—perhaps only the more certainly—refer with gratitude his cure to the interposition of B. in his behalf. Or again, to take another instance: a ship is on the rocks in a storm. Death threatens all in it. Those on shore mark their signals of distress, and provide the means for their escape. And those rescued feel that they owe to them their deliverance, while they listen to the steps through which that deliverance was secured. The ignorant might assign to chance the fact that the projectile reached them with its rope attached by which they were enabled to gain the shore. The scientific man might calmly show the beautiful laws of motion by which it was directed to the spot where they were. The more truly wise would see reason for deepest gratitude to those who had exerted themselves to effect for them a deliverance from impending death. And the higher, spiritual mind would go one step farther, and see in this at least a figure, possibly an actual instance, of God's interposition to meet man's necessities and answer his prayers.

Thus it is in no way a valid argument against the efficacy of prayer to say that we do not ask of God to work a miracle in answer to our prayers. It is by no means true that we attribute to Divine interposition meeting our re-

quests only those effects which we are not, with our present knowledge, able to attribute to any known direct antecedent or cause. There are good reasons why "no sane and moderately intelligent person" would think of praying when he "has an absolute conviction that the events in question are so fixed, unaltering and unalterable, that they are beyond the scope of prayer." Alike, whether he can or cannot refer an event to its known proximate cause, the believer can assign it ultimately to Divine interposition, and that in answer to his prayer.

CHAPTER IV.

PRAYER IN RELATION TO THE GREATNESS OF GOD.

GRANTED, now, that the idea of prayer being heard and answered by the Supreme Being is not incompatible with the idea of the fixed order of the universe, which is, as a general rule, everywhere maintained: still, it may be contended, the belief in prayer is unreasonable, as being inconsistent with our idea of the greatness of God. Think how immeasurably, nay, how inconceivably great, must God be! Think of all the wonders and beauties of our own world as they lie spread out before our view; still more, as they are shown by the light of science investigating the deeper things which do not so obviously present themselves to the mind, and drawing out the secrets of nature through careful observation and experiment, and the processes of inference founded upon them. Go on to think of those other worlds which people space, some of which have been brought more or less within the range of our knowledge through the appliances of

powerful instruments aiding the natural powers of sight. Extend your thought to the worlds and systems of worlds which may exist possibly in the realms which lie indefinitely extended altogether beyond our view. Consider how one mighty unseen Spirit called the whole into being at the first, and imparted to certain portions of it that force which pervades matter in a thousand various forms, and gave to other portions of it that still more mysterious and diversified power which we call "life." And then reflect whether it is reasonable to suppose that this most mighty Being, the Infinite Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of all, can bend His ear to the prayers—and so order the course of things in His vast universe as to affect the interests —of each single unit in one, perhaps comparatively insignificant, world. So an objector may fairly argue in opposition to the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer. So many a one may think, perhaps, for a moment, in the half-formed fancy of his mind. And the shadow of doubt, as of a passing cloud, may dim the bright sunlight of God's presence falling on the soul to cheer and gladden it as it lifts itself up in the hour of sorrow in prayer to its Father in Heaven for His help from on high.

The general argument, which has here been

applied to the particular question of the efficacy of prayer, regarded as contradicting the supposition of any interference with our world on the part of God, has been so forcibly urged by one of our first scientific men, that to quote it will put the objection here considered in the strongest light. It must be premised that the application of the words of David given at the close cannot be accepted for a moment, as will be shown farther on. "Transferring thought," he writes, "from our little sand-grain of an earth to the immeasurable heavens where countless worlds, with their freights of life, probably revolve unseen, the very suns which warm them being scarcely seen by us across abysmal space; reflecting that beyond these sparks of solar fire suns innumerable may lie whose light can never stir the optic nerve at all; and bringing this conception face to face with the idea that the Builder and Sustainer of it all should contract Himself to a burning bush, or behave in other familiar ways ascribed to Him—it is easy to understand how astounding the incongruity must appear to the scientific man. Under the pressure of the awe which this universe inspires, well may we exclaim, in David's spirit, if not in David's words, 'When I consider Thy heavens, the

work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou shouldest be mindful of him? or the son of man that Thou shouldest visit him?'"

Now, perhaps, with regard to the whole of this argument, it must be said that we are in error, not knowing the true nature of the greatness of God. We make very free in our conceptions of Him, and our thoughts as to what His dealings must be. But, probably, we ought to view it as an essential part of the idea of His infinite greatness that nothing should be too minute to engage His sympathy and care, as well as that nothing should be too grand for His direction and control. Even in our judgment with regard to men on earth, we do not count it a part of true greatness, but the reverse, that a man should be able to give his thoughts and attention to wide views only, and larger schemes of utility in political and social life, while unable to give heed to minuter details and individual needs. We accept it as a necessary imperfection. We do not commend it as a virtue in the least. Perhaps the notion of its being part of greatness arises from this, that we *prefer* the power which can take wider views *only*, to that which is capable of dealing with smaller details alone.

To this must be added, that we are very imperfect judges as to what may be great and small in the eye of God. Before Him, Who is Infinite, probably much of the distinction between great and small, as we draw it, may vanish in great measure: much as, with ourselves, the difference of hill and vale, which we see when we are on a plain, is lost when we look down on all from some height above. Often, too, we are led to discover that those things which seemed before to us insignificant, have a most important bearing, and exercise a great influence, far beyond what we should have supposed possible before. Indeed, I conceive one great lesson which we learn in the school of experience is, how very much turns upon little things: how much, sometimes, the main formation of a character eventually, perhaps some great influential movement affecting the destiny of a country or a race, may have been the result of some (as it seemed in itself) insignificant event; how much good may be hindered, or evil done, through the intervention of something seemingly trifling and small. And the scientific inquirer, I imagine, would say that his observations lead him to the same result. And thus we cannot judge how any one event, occurring in any one portion

of the universe, may appear to the view of an All-seeing God.

And, in confirmation of this, it must be said that, *as a fact*, the same Infinite wisdom, the same tender care, is displayed in the construction of the least, as of the greatest, of the works of God's Hand. The mechanism may be less complex, the adaptation of means to ends may be more simple, in some cases than in others. But there *is* the same perfection in its kind in the mechanism given; there *is* the same application of means to the ends to be produced, alike in the smallest and in the greatest of the organisms in the animal and vegetable kingdoms; alike in those which seem to play a humbler, and in those which perform a more important part in the economy of the world. We cannot, in fact, trace any sign of such differences as are often made by ourselves, in the attention, if we may so speak with reverence, given to the various portions of the universe by God.

And the farther scientific inquiry penetrates into the minutiæ of nature, the more it seems to confirm this view. Improved appliances enable the mind to investigate farther, and bring before the view minute objects which were unobserved before. The division of la-

bour, which is being continually carried farther and farther on, gives opportunity for more detailed examination of particular points. And the result is in all cases the same. All things alike, the smallest as well as the greatest, reflect the goodness of God, and display at once His power and His loving care. There is no such thing as neglect of small things, or comparative indifference to them, discernible in the works of the Almighty Creator. The same magnifying power which brings out the flaws and imperfections of the minuter parts of human workmanship, though these parts may have appeared sufficiently good before, does but reveal the same perfection and the same exquisite skill of the great and loving Artificer, shown equally in the smallest and the greatest of His works.

But after all there is a yet higher point of view, regarded from which the difficulties with respect to the reasonableness of prayer, arising from a consideration of the greatness of God, almost entirely fade away. For prayer, as it rises up to the great Creator, has reference, to a great extent, to the condition and the wants of man: and man is, indeed, very great. Degraded as he may be from his high position, in great measure, through the abuse of the very freedom which in part constitutes his high pre-

rogative and his greatness; with his powers of body, mind, and soul to a great degree impaired—man bears about with him the marks of intrinsic greatness still. He may be more or less a ruin; but he is a noble ruin none the less. Put aside, if you will, the Scripture revelation that man is made "in the image of God." Reject, if it be so, the Christian doctrine that God became Man, which seems to involve in it the correlative doctrine which renders the other possible, that man partakes of the nature of God. Still, view man as he is, in his complex organization and bodily powers; view him in his high intellectual capabilities; view him in his susceptibility to lofty, intense, lasting devotion, his deep spiritual yearnings after things higher than any which this world can supply, and a perfection which he cannot in himself attain; view him, once more, in the degree of development possible to him, and to him alone—and all must admit the inherent greatness of man. The seeming superiority of the lasting, mighty, outward world over man, in his transitory existence, his feeble powers, vanishes as the gifted nature of man's immortal spirit comes into view. The sophist-whisper of doubt is hushed; the confidence of the trustful spirit, as it pours forth itself in prayer, is restored. We cease

to wonder that the great God should listen to the prayers of His—as He designed him to be —great, and noble, and god-like child.

And it is only carrying the same argument one step farther to add, before concluding this chapter, that the same God Who has given to man this high being, this glorious destiny, does also, we believe, watch over him, as a fact, with special care. We take the words of the Psalmist in a sense just the opposite to that given to them by the distinguished scientific man referred to before, "What is man, that Thou *art* mindful of him: and the son of man, that Thou *dost* visit him?" The turn given to the expression of David, "that Thou shouldest be mindful of him," and "that Thou shouldest visit him," is not, it has been truly said, in David's spirit any more than in David's words. "What is man that Thou shouldest be mindful of him?" means that the supposition is inadmissible. "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" means that the fact is certain. Indeed that God has been mindful of man by wondrous interpositions of His Providence, and special effusions of His grace; that God has visited man in the Person of His own eternal Son—these are truths which all will admit who accept the Bible as the true record of God's dealings

with mankind. But, putting this quite aside now, no one who looks out on outward nature, and marks its wonderful adaptation throughout to the wants and the enjoyments of man, so that it must be regarded as designed to minister to man's needs and man's happiness, whatever other ends it may serve in the multiform purposes of God—scarcely any one who marks the history of his own individual life—can fail to believe that a higher Power watches over men, and directs the course of events for their good. And, if so, difficulties as to the reasonableness of prayer in reference to God's greatness are so far removed.

And thus, whether we reflect on the true nature of the greatness of God, to Whom prayer is addressed, or the intrinsic greatness of man, according to the design of God—which may, perhaps, make things in reference to their bearing on man, though in themselves insignificant, great in His sight—for things are great or small, sometimes, by reference to that to which they have regard—and the beneficent care for man's interests everywhere displayed, we can see no ground in this admitted greatness of the Almighty Creator for thinking that prayer is unreasonable, or doubting that it may be effectual with Him.

CHAPTER V.

PRAYER IN RELATION TO THE WISDOM AND UNCHANGEABLENESS OF GOD.

But it may be urged that, however the idea of prayer being heard and answered may be shown to be compatible with the greatness of the Infinite Being Who has made and sustains our world, still it is quite incompatible with the idea which we naturally entertain of the perfect wisdom and absolute unchangeableness of God. Were there, it may be argued, (if it can be said with reverence,) any possibility of error with God, if there were any conceivable room for change or caprice with Him, then it would be reasonable to imagine Him changed and moved by sympathy with man in his sorrows, directed by man's declarations of his needs, influenced by that delighting, confiding communion with Him which constitutes the most true, comprehensive view of prayer. But when we think of Him rightly as perfectly wise, planning everything

with unerring foresight, exactly in such manner as is best; and when we go on to conceive Him as wholly unchangeable, without variableness or shadow of turning, is it anything less than supposing Him to contradict His very Being, to imagine Him directed in His disposition of events by man's petitions; moved to change, and perform that which He would not otherwise have performed, in answer to man's prayers?

To put the matter in another way. If God is influenced by man's prayers in ordering the course of events in the world, it must be either with reference to the ends in view, or in reference to the means by which they are to be produced. Now we cannot think it possible that any ends should be in His view but those which are highest and best: the glory of God, and the true well-being of man. And, similarly, we may be sure that the means employed by Him are just those which are the most fitted for compassing the ends in view. Whereas to suppose Him to adopt one course in preference to another, in answer to our prayers, implies that the course which would have been followed, had our prayers not intervened, would either have been a wrong one in reference to the end to be attained, or, at least, not so good a one

as the course adopted at our suggestion and in consequence of our prayer. And thus there is no place left for the supposed influence of prayer as moving the will and affecting the counsels of an all-wise and unchanging God.

Now, with regard to this latter way of exhibiting the argument, (which I hope has been stated in the very fullest and fairest way), it must be said, first of all, that we do not know how far this method of analyzing conduct into ends and means applies to the system of management of an Infinite God. *We* can speak of means and ends, in regard to the motive powers by which *our own* wills are set on work. But we must speak with caution when we apply the same distinction to the Divine action, except as a means of representing it more clearly to ourselves.

And, with respect to the argument at large, it may fairly be maintained that it supposes quite a different state of things from that which exists, *as a fact*, in the world. It takes no account of the actually existing condition of things, which, when observed, destroys the argument at the very roots. What is meant will be understood more exactly if the following considerations are duly weighed.

Imagine a man—to view the matter on a small human scale first—ordering his household with

the most consummate wisdom supposable in man, with the highest ends proposed, and all things made to converge with perfect accuracy towards those ends. And further, let all in his household move with mechanical order, such as is observed in the outward world, never diverging from their prescribed orbit, performing the parts assigned to them according to strict law. There is now no room for the supposition of change, except on the supposition of error on the part of him by whom all was in the first instance arranged.

But admit into this system of things the element of free-will; grant that the members of the household are allowed to act freely, within certain limits indeed, and under conditions influencing their action to a great degree, but with an admitted freedom still—and the state of the case is changed at once. For, through the action of this freedom, new conditions and new combinations of circumstances are introduced, owing to which new arrangements in the course of events may become possible or necessary, without any disparagement of the wisdom of the ruler of the household at all. His principles of administration, his view of what is best, and most expedient for the end in view, may, nevertheless, remain unchanged.

That He Whom we have in view is not man, but Almighty God; that His wisdom is Infinite, in contrast with the finite wisdom of the wisest of mankind; and that the sphere in which His wisdom is exercised is one infinitely exceeding any in which man's wisdom can be called upon to act—makes no difference as to the argument in this case. Limit his freedom as we may—represent it as influenced by surrounding conditions as we will—man is free. He cannot give up his freedom. He can do, or abstain from doing. He may act in this way, or that way, according to the, ultimately, self-determining power of the will. And we can at once understand how one single act performed through this freedom given to man's will—especially one act out of harmony with the will of God respecting His creatures—may bring in its train a change in the whole condition of things with which it is connected. And thus that becomes possible which would, indeed, but for man's freedom, have been inconsistent with the perfect wisdom of God, viz. change: change in the order of events, which yet does not for a moment contravene the perfect wisdom or the absolute unchangeableness of God.

And thus those difficulties which were

stated at the outset of this chapter as to the reasonableness of prayer, when considered in relation to the perfect wisdom and absolute unchangeableness of God, to a great extent disappear. Contingency, not fixedness, is the order of the world. The plan is, indeed, laid out by Infinite wisdom. The principles of the Divine administration remain absolutely unchanged. But part of this very plan of wisdom is, to introduce into the midst of the system a free agent, who is, so far, a disturbing cause in the otherwise fixed order of things. And the actual administration of the world must be carried on with a regard to the conditions which that free agency may produce. Change; adaptation of events to altered circumstances; remedial provision for new wants—all these things, we see, must form a part in the government of the world, *as a fact;* for we do, as a fact, observe the existence of things requiring them on every side. And therefore, supposing prayer to be effectual at all, there is nothing unreasonable in believing its efficacy, on the ground that all is arranged by Infinite wisdom, and ordered by a Being to Whom change is unknown.

It comes here in our way to notice, while considering prayer in relation to the wisdom of God, that reason itself can discover wise pur-

poses which this very condition of change, with the opportunities for prayer to which it gives rise, may be designed to serve. For no one who observes man's nature simply as a fact can fail to mark that he has certain tendencies and desires which lift him up towards things above this earth, and which we speak of as "spiritual." So much so, that we look on any one as falling, so far, below his true being, whose thoughts and affections are wholly centred on earthly objects, in a way in which we never speak of brute creatures when they, following their nature, do the same. As, reversely, we admire and approve of, as rising up to the true dignity of man's nature, one who is—not refined merely, for mere refinement carries us only a little way; but—spiritually-minded, having his thoughts and aspirations and desires constantly lifted up above the mere passing things of time and sense. And that prayer has an obvious tendency to produce or advance this spiritual elevation, though it is no proof in itself in favour of its efficacy, is yet an argument for it as part of the plan laid down in His perfect wisdom for our world by God.

This argument would hold good on the assumption that man is in an upright condi-

tion, and employs his powers according to their original design. Even so, as cultivating and developing those powers higher and higher, there would be full room for the value of prayer. But the argument becomes considerably strengthened, when man is viewed as fallen away from his true condition in some measure, or as being, (as even one of the great Heathen moralists could express it,) "Easily carried away somehow to the pursuit of pleasure," even though it may not be attainable in accordance with what conscience within prescribes as right. For, when man is thus found to abuse more or less the freedom which is given him, and to feel confident in his own powers, and to lose his regard for God and allegiance to Him, and his sense of dependence upon Him for help, what means can be conceived more effectual for *bringing back* man to his true condition, as well as for educating and advancing his spiritual faculties when so restored, than this—that he should be led to have constant recourse to God in prayer; and that, to a great extent, through the very difficulties, troubles, and disorders, brought about in the world by man's disobedience, or imperfect obedience, to the will of God?

These considerations apply to the subject of

prayer in relation to the *wisdom* of God. And, in a similar way, with reference to prayer in relation to the *unchangeableness* of God, it must be observed that the idea of God which must be presumed in dealing with the question of prayer at all is not as an immutable *system*, but as a *Person*, a Personal Being. And with the idea of personality we essentially connect the idea of Will. And Will, we naturally think of as capable of being influenced. So that we regard as the highest form of will, not that which is the most stern and unbending, but that which is most delicately sensitive to the wants and wishes and requests of those around: the strict principles of right by which it is regulated being all the while inflexibly maintained. And thus, so far as human reason can guide us, we may well conceive of God as unchangeable in His Infinite perfection, and yet influenced by man's petitions offered up amid the ever-varying circumstances of man's life in the world.

So that, view the matter which way we will, there is really nothing unreasonable, but the reverse, in the idea of the efficacy of prayer, regarded in reference to the Infinite wisdom and Absolute unchangeableness which form an integral part of our conception of God.

CHAPTER VI.

PRAYER IN RELATION TO THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

But it may be contended that the whole argument maintained in the last chapter, as well as in that of the chapter which preceded it, leaves out of sight altogether the goodness and beneficence of God. It may be granted that God is *so* great, so infinitely great, that nothing can be too small, too trifling (as we deem it) to engage His notice, and draw to it His care. It may be admitted that, in the scheme which His infinite wisdom has planned, there is place for His continual interposition, according to the variation of circumstances which man's free agency may introduce, and this without any violation of the absolute unchangeableness which we attribute to God. But still, granted all this, it may be said that the perfect goodness of God presents an insuperable difficulty in the way of our believing in the efficacy of

prayer. If God is All-good and All-wise, He cannot need to be told of, He cannot require to be implored to supply, the wants of the creatures of His hand.[1]

Or the objection may be stated thus, to put it in its strongest form:—Suppose God to have listened to the prayer of one in need, and to have answered it according to the wishes of him by whom it was offered up. Now, either we must suppose Him to have been ignorant of the man's need, though willing to supply it when known; and then the perfect wisdom and foreknowledge of God are impugned. Or else we must suppose Him to have known the man's wants beforehand, and yet to have required to be moved to supply them; and this is contrary to our idea of God's perfect goodness and love, according to which we must suppose Him ready and willing always to bestow that at once which He knows to be truly best for each. And then, in this way, it may be said, by the idea of the efficacy of prayer either the perfect

[1] "We seem to think" (one writer says) "either that God does not know what we need, or, at all events, what we would rather have: or that He would be offended if we did not tell Him, although He knows. And we are indignant with those who tell us (as the scientific thinker does) that our prayers for such matters are a pure waste of breath."

goodness or the perfect wisdom of God is arraigned.

The argument in itself must be admitted to be a strong one. Indeed, it might be difficult apparently to know how it is to be answered, if it were not found to be opposed to another set of facts, which show by analogy the error of the grounds on which the argument is based. We may not venture to affirm much as to the purposes which may have been in the view of the All-wise Creator when He planned the system of our world. But we may at least conceive it possible that, in ordaining among men the existence of the relationships of father to son, ruler to subjects, and the like, He designed to give us a figure of those spiritual relationships in which we stand to Him. And certainly, we cannot go wrong in considering that which does, as a fact, hold with regard to those earthly relations, and applying what is thus ascertained, as a means of explaining what *may be* true as to the relation in which we stand to our Creator, though it cannot, of course, show that it *is*. It will be enough to remove difficulties, if not to afford proof.

Now, it is quite clear that what seems to raise a difficulty with regard to the efficacy of prayer, when it is viewed in relation to the

perfect goodness of God, occurs with respect to the dealings of a child with its parent, where, notwithstanding, no such difficulty is felt. The parent grants the request of the child. Nay, in many cases, whether the thing to be granted is bestowed or not, depends on its being asked for or not. The fault of the argument now becomes clear at once. We could not argue against the wisdom or the love of the parent, because he waited to be asked by the child. We cannot say that he must have known what the child would desire, and what it might desire rightly, and yet have withheld it through deficiency of love; or else that he must have been ignorant as to what it would rightly desire, though willing to acquiesce in its desire, and grant it, when made known. We see at once that there is a fallacy in the argument somewhere, in this case. And therefore we may quite infer that there may similarly be a flaw in the argument, when it is applied to the dealings of God with man.

And if we go on to examine how this is, we find it to arise from this in great measure, that the mere supply of the wants of the person making the petition, is not the whole account of the matter either in the one case or the other. There is a moral and spiritual character to be

educated, as well as a physical nature whose wants are to be supplied. And these two are very closely interlinked; so that it is very much through the instrumentality of the lower part of man's being, that the development and guidance of the higher is carried on. The child wants something allowable, nay desirable, nay (we will suppose) absolutely necessary for its support. And yet it may argue nothing against either the intelligent care of the parent for his child, or against the sincerity of his love, that he desires request for the thing needed to be made. There is a *sense* of dependence to be brought out, where the *state* of dependence is the condition of the child as a fact. There is a consciousness of weakness to be elicited and trained, that rashness and over-confidence may be checked, and self-reliance, resting on its true foundations, may eventually be reared. There is an appreciation of the parent's kindness and love to be cultivated; perhaps the knowledge of his wiser foresight, by which the very wants in question have had provision made for them long before, to be gained. There is the high and noble feeling of gratitude to be drawn forth, by which man is to be linked to his fellow-man in the golden chains of love, and a fresh rivet is to be added to the great system of

union, through which the social order and well-being of mankind are maintained. And these faculties of man are called into action, these qualities of his moral being are developed, through the prayer of the child to his parent, or the friend to his friend, which is the expression of that which is passing within, the *outward action* (if we may so term it) of the inner being, which—as all outward action does—stamps a more deep and lasting impress on the character of the inner life.

And thus, by parity of reasoning, we may argue that there is nothing unreasonable, but the reverse, in our being required to make known our requests to God, Who yet does not, in Himself, either need to be informed of them, as if He were ignorant, or to be moved to supply them, as if He were wanting in love. Granted that we are—which must be supposed, in order even for the difficulty to be raised—dependent upon the care of God, and that He is as willing as He is able to extend to us His care, still it may well be His will that we should address Him in prayer, setting forth our desires and our wants; and that He should make His grant dependent in great measure on our request. Were it otherwise; were all our wants supplied at once, and without any sup-

plication made on our part to God, it is easy to see what the natural consequences would be. We should cease very much to think of God as a Personal Being, and more, as our Father in Heaven: much as a child might cease to think of his earthly parent, if he were cut off from all communion with him; though his wants might be really supplied, as a fact, by the parent in an indirect way. We should soon forget our dependence upon God, and place ourselves in a false position, as imagining ourselves to be independent, with all our needs supplied according to an unfailing law. And with that imaginary independence would come a spirit of absolute self-reliance, trust to the keen intellect, and the indomitable energy, and the strong will, which are to the man, for the time, as his God. And with the growth of this confidence in self would vanish that grateful adoration of a higher, unseen Power which arises from, and itself in turn cherishes and increases, the sense of being from moment to moment watched over by the care of an All-wise and All-loving God. And so, with the notes of prayer to God, would die away the notes of thanksgiving too. And with the loss of gratitude, would be lost also very much of our theme of praise. For the spirit would less occupy itself in searching out

the attributes of God, and exploring new ranges in which they are displayed. Love and gratitude would no longer fire it with desire to search out fresh and fresh manifestations of His infinite wisdom and power and beneficence, in the composition and order of outward nature, and in the disposition of events in their bearing on political, social, domestic life in the world. And in this way, a living faith in God, and constant thought of Him, as He is in Himself, and as the giver of all temporal and spiritual blessings to men, would gradually die out, not being kept alive, and called forth, by the constant action of prayer. And man would not become fitted, by communion with God, and that lifting up of the spirit to Him, which goes far towards elevating the spirit into likeness to Him on Whom it spiritually looks, for being with Him, and holding communion with Him, in a future, eternal state.

So clearly is it apparent—not to pursue the subject any farther—how very much depends on our being led to make our requests, as children to a parent, to God in prayer. So compatible does the efficacy of prayer appear not only with the infinite wisdom, but also with the absolute love, of God. So reasonable, even on grounds which human sagacity can discover,

is the precept of the Apostle, "In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." So much does it evince the wise, loving care of God for His children, so much does it bear witness to His goodness, instead of being incompatible with it, that the supply of man's wants should be made, in great measure, dependent on man's prayer.

CHAPTER VII.

PRAYER IN RELATION TO THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

The observations advanced in the foregoing chapters will, practically, have met very much any difficulty which may be felt as to the reasonableness of prayer, arising from a consideration of the absolute foreknowledge of God, and perfect pre-ordination of all things by Him. But still, in case the difficulty should lurk in the minds of any, with all the more force, because it is enveloped in mystery, and its dimensions are not exactly ascertained, it may be well to devote a few pages to this subject in particular. The difficulty shall be fully and fairly stated first. And then such reflections shall be offered as may seem in some measure to meet the difficulty, so far as we are able at all to comprehend a matter so much above our understanding as the foreknowledge and fore-ordination of God.

To state the difficulty first. If all that is to be

is perfectly foreseen, as we must suppose it to be, by Him before Whom, in His infinite wisdom, the whole future must be open to the view; if, further, it is not only foreknown, but also fore-ordained, so that nothing can happen but what is in accordance with the fore-ordained plan of His perfect will, what place, it may be thought, is there here for prayer? If that which we ask for—as, e. g., a fruitful season, or the recovery of one from illness, or the safe journey of one whom we love—is already fore-ordained in the counsels of Infinite Wisdom, directing the course of our world, what need is there that we should pray for it, or how can it be viewed as granted in answer to our prayer? If the matter be contingent, depending for its being granted on our prayer, how can this be reconciled with the idea of God's perfect knowledge as foreseeing, His infinite wisdom as fore-ordaining, everything which is to come to pass? If it be dependent upon our prayer, which is uncertain, how can it be certainly fore-ordained? If it be absolutely fore-ordained and fixed, how can it be given in answer to our prayers?

Now, with regard to the whole matter of the foreknowledge and the predestination of God, it must be admitted to be so far beyond the

range of our faculties, that we cannot fathom it, or solve all the difficulties to which it gives rise. We must admit the facts on both sides, without requiring that an absolutely satisfactory harmony between them should be shown. On the one hand, we cannot even conceive of the Infinite Being otherwise than as knowing all things, foreseeing the end from the beginning, and also as arranging all things according to the counsel of His perfect will. We cannot imagine anything unforeseen by God, or as resulting independently of Him on Whom all things from moment to moment depend. And yet, on the other hand, apart from the speculative difficulties which disturb the minds of the few, there is nothing felt practically to hinder the child-like confidence with which we pour forth our prayers to our Father in Heaven, believing that He can, and will, order the course of events in accordance with our requests, if He sees that to do so will be really for our good; and believing also that His disposal of events is, to a certain extent, dependent on our prayers to Him.

And it may at least illustrate the position of the question, if it does not assist us to solve the difficulty, if we consider that the same problems with regard to the foreknowledge and predes-

tination of events by God, meet us at other points of spiritual inquiry as well. The whole subject of our free-agency, of the whole self-determining power, to a certain extent, of man's own will, stands in apparent conflict with the doctrine that all things are foreknown and fore-arranged of God. For how, it may be fairly questioned, can we be perfectly free in doing that, of good or of evil, which yet is not only foreseen by God, but is also part of His scheme whereby certain ends pre-arranged by Him are carried out? And the same difficulty occurs also as to the moral government of God. If our actions are foreknown and fore-ordained by Him, how can they be the subjects of praise or censure, reward or punishment? "Why" (in the language of the objector introduced in Scripture) "doth He yet find fault?" is the argument of the evil-doer. The virtuous man, indeed, would not willingly give up *his* approval and reward. And yet, as the heathen moralist could see, virtue and vice stand on the same footing. Both must be involuntary, or both free. We cannot claim to be free in the case of right-doing only, and in that to merit reward, whilst we are irresponsible in doing wrong.

These corresponding difficulties in matters

more immediately under our notice, at least illustrate the position in which we stand as to the question of the compatibility of God's pre-arrangement of events, in His perfect wisdom and foreknowledge, with the efficacy of prayer. The two classes of facts in each case must be set side by side, while it is admitted that we cannot altogether harmonize the dealings of a Being Who is infinite, with the requirements of our finite thought. And the view of Bishop Butler, when he regards the doctrine of the Divine pre-ordination of events as compatible with our free agency *as a fact*, and *practically*, may be applied to the efficacy of prayer. "The notion of necessity," he writes[1], "is not applicable to practical subjects: i. e. with respect to them it is as if it were not true. Nor does this contain any reflection upon reason, but only what is unreasonable. For, to pretend to act upon reason, in opposition to practical principles, which the Author of our nature gave us to act upon, and to pretend to apply our reason to subjects with regard to which our own short views, and even our experience, will show us cannot be depended upon—and such at least the subject of necessity must be—this is vanity, conceit, and unreasonableness." Or, as he

[1] "Analogy," part I. ch. vi.

simply sums it up at the end of the chapter, "the opinion of necessity, considered as practical, is false."

Lifting up our thoughts into a higher sphere, wherein an Infinite Being governs all things with a wisdom such as we, with our finite powers, can but faintly conceive, we view all things as absolutely foreknown, all absolutely fore-ordained, (so far as we may apply to Him the conditions of time which belong to our minds,) in the counsels of His perfect will. And then, turning our eyes down to our own little finite world, we see men within that mighty framework, as it were, of an Almighty Being's superintending care, acting, as a fact, as free; governed, as a fact, as free; and rewarded or punished as responsible for what they do. We admit the reasonableness of their conduct in these cases; nay, we should deem it most unreasonable for men to act otherwise, and attempt to live as if they were not free; and this, while yet reason, from another point of view, cannot explain how it is that, in the Divine system, they are free. We are sure that, in some way, within the comprehensive scheme of the Divine arrangement of things, must be included man's freedom, and the results which that freedom of action will produce.

And, in a like manner, we see men kneeling before their unseen Creator in adoring gratitude and earnest prayer. And we admit that here, too, there may be the action of a true instinct, and no mere delusion of the fancy, called forth by hope or fear; though we may be unable to explain wholly how the absolute arrangement of events in the wisdom of an Infinite Being, is to be harmonized with the dependence of them in a measure on ourselves, and our supplication to Him for the supply of our individual needs, so that we can rightly thank Him for mercies past, and pray to Him for blessings to come. But we believe that all *may be* harmonized fully. We accept both, God's fore-ordination of things, and the efficacy of our prayers, *as a fact*. We think that, with that mighty Being, not only all the volitions and actions, but also all the prayers—all the humble, trustful, adoring converse with Him—of every single one, may well be open to His infinite view, and enter, with all their consequences, into His scheme of infinite wisdom for the government of our world. "However I may decide," writes Canon Liddon, "my decision, so absolutely free to me, will have been already incorporated by the all-seeing, all-controlling Being, as an integral part, how-

ever insignificant, of His own all-embracing purpose, leading on to causes and effects beyond itself. Prayer, too, is only a foreseen action of man, which, together with its results, is embraced in the eternal predestination of God. . . God works out His plans not merely in us but by us; and we may dare to say that that which to us is a free self-determination, may not be other than a foreseen element of His work[2]."

It should, perhaps, just be added here, that, were prayer incompatible with the Divine order, it would be strange that He, to Whose infinite wisdom the delusion with regard to it under which men through long ages would labour must have been foreknown, should not have made some provision whereby to deter men from falling into the error, instead of encouraging them in it, or, at least, allowing them to continue in it undeceived. "One of two things," it has been urged, "seems quite certain. Either God answers prayer, or He has so skilfully arranged the working of His 'immutable laws,' as to produce the impression that He does so, and thereby encourage the faithful to believe that they have a Father in Heaven, instead of being in the grasp of an almighty machine."

[2] "Some Elements of Religion," p. 193.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON CASES IN WHICH PRAYER APPEARS TO BE UNANSWERED.

Against the whole argument maintained in the foregoing chapters in favour of the efficacy of prayer, it may be objected that prayer is sometimes—nay, often—unanswered *as a fact*. This, it may be said, at once cuts at the root of all arguments advanced on the side of the possibility, or even the probability, that it may have weight, and be the means of influencing the course of events with regard to others or ourselves. If God is perfectly, unchangeably, good, and if prayer is ever effectual with Him, moving Him to supply the needs, and fulfil the desires, of those who address Him in prayer—how is it that prayer ever fails? That it does fail at times, seems to be a proof that it never does, really, prevail. It seems to show that those are but accidental coincidences, which we take to be answers to prayer. We note, it may be said, only those cases in which our

prayer, and the event desired, harmonize; and build our theory upon these. We omit to take account of those instances in which our prayer is not attended by the desired result. And thus it might seem to be with those who pray, as with those who had recourse to the oracles of old, and who laid all their stress on those cases in which the oracle happened to turn out true. To which must be added (it may be urged) the increased facility of deception arising from the ambiguity of the oracle given, or the prayer offered up, enabling any one who wished to do so to trace more readily a fancied connexion between the event following and the oracle or the prayer. *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc,* an objector might argue, is the latent fallacy underlying all belief in the power of prayer.

It must, however, be plain to any one who will be at the pains to weigh the matter for himself, that no valid argument against the efficacy of prayer in general can really be drawn from the fact that it does, in some cases, fail to obtain a response, or, certainly, does not gain the particular response which was the special object of the request in the prayer. That a parent sometimes refuses the request of a child, is no proof against the ordinary fulfilment of the child's requests. And many causes may be conceived

as intervening so, as either to prevent our prayers from being answered by God, or, at least, to prevent their being fulfilled in the way in which we looked to have them fulfilled by Him: while yet this may in no way interfere with the general truth, that our prayers are, under certain conditions, heard and answered by God.

Thus it may in some, perhaps in many, cases occur that the particular thing which we desire and ask for would not really conduce to the end with a view to which we desire it, and therefore is not accorded to us, even for our own true good, by God. He, in His infinite wisdom, must see far beyond the limits which bound our finite view. And we may well conceive it possible that He may see that the thing which we long for as the one object on which our affections are set, would, if gained, be so far from being conducive to our happiness, that it would really bring sorrow instead in its train. Thus He may, in denying them, be most really granting our requests. To withhold the particular thing asked for, may be to grant most truly the desire of our heart. Even an earthly parent is forced, of very love, to refuse that which he knows would be injurious to his child. In how infinitely fuller a degree must the same

thing hold with reference to the dealings of God with mankind!

To this must be added, that God may have higher ends in view towards which He would direct us: and that for this purpose He may withhold at times those things which would, indeed, conduce to the end which we have in view ourselves, while they would, even by virtue of their conducing to those objects, so far draw us away from pursuing the higher ends which He would set before our hearts and minds. Wealth does, no doubt, bring material prosperity, which is desired by most. Poverty does bring commonly sorrow and trouble in its train. Yet it is by no means the case that prosperity is with men at large the best condition for drawing them to the thought of God, and of the true end of their existence, the glory and service of the Great Author of their being, the fulfilment of the work assigned to them on earth by Him, and their preparation for an eternal existence with Him in heaven. And thus, even while it is admitted that the things desired *would* lead to the particular end with a view to which they are sought, it may be that our petitions for them are denied by an all-wise and most beneficent Being, for the purpose that, through the denial of them, we may be

placed in a better position for the attainment of those higher and more lasting objects which He, of His goodness, proposes for our pursuit instead.

From both these two points of view we can see the force of those words in the collect which is appointed to close our public service of daily prayer, wherein we ask of God to grant the desires of our hearts, and the petitions which we have made, "as may be most expedient for us;" in so far, and in such ways, as He, in His wisdom, may know to be conducive to our interests; and that not our present temporal well-being only, but our true eternal good.

Then, further, as a third point, it must be borne in mind that all our desires are to be bounded by this, all our requests qualified by this, that what we desire or ask for be in accordance with the will of God. And, by the very nature of the case, we can know but little as to the Divine will. We cannot tell how far that which we desire and pray for may be in harmony with that will. We need not think of the vain petitions sometimes offered up, the folly of which could move even the heathen to scorn[1]. But the prayers which rise from the

[1] See Persius, Sat. ii. 31—40.

spirits of even the wisest and best of men must be offered to the Divine Being with the reservation expressed or implied, that the thing desired is asked for only if it be in accordance with His will. For we know not how far our seeming wisdom may be foolishness in His sight. We cannot fathom—the wisest of men, probably, never will fathom—the mystery which hangs over much of the course of events in the world. We cannot penetrate into the mighty plan, we cannot know the mind of God. And it becomes, I suppose, only a question of words whether we shall say that a prayer has been granted or denied, when the thing asked for, even if good in itself, has not been granted, as being incompatible with the whole scheme of God, if we ourselves, in making the request, have sincerely asked for it, only if it were in accordance with God's will.

And then, as a last point, in examining cases in which prayer seems to have met with no response, account must be taken of those conditions and qualifications which are wanting not unfrequently in those who offer prayer, and which yet even natural reason would lead us to suppose must be present, if our prayers are to be acceptable, and obtain an answer from the Great Controller of the world.

To consider these qualifications in any detail belongs to the province of practical theology, and would be unsuitable here. But—just to illustrate what is meant—it must be obvious to all, that those cannot draw near effectually to an all-holy God, who are not striving to cultivate a holy character, and are surrendering themselves to evil courses in life. It is vain to suppose that the all-righteous Spirit, who is too pure to bear the presence of iniquity, can be pleased with the communion, and listen to the address, of one who is in no way striving to do that which He approves, and become in his inner being like to Him from Whom he has his existence, and in Whom he hopes to live an eternal life. And, as all His works set forth the goodness and beneficence of God, and confirm that which the Scriptures emphatically declare of Him, that He *is* Love, as if it were of the very essence of His being, one quality, it is clear, specially requisite in those who would present their petitions to Him, must be a spirit of love or charity towards their fellow-men. The sullen, pecvish, morose disposition; the angry passion; the selfish indifference about the well-being of others; the want, generally, of a real, living desire to do what we can for the good of our fellow-men, and of a sympathy in

their sorrows and their joys,—must be a bar, making our prayers ineffectual, and preventing them from obtaining God's help. Neither, once more, can we suppose that prayers will be availing, when offered by those who are wanting in thorough faith or confidence in the Power which can, and the Love which will, answer the prayers which are poured forth from the lips. It may be that one purpose for which the grant of blessings is made dependent (if it be so) upon our prayers, is in order that thereby may be cultivated in us a sense of our entire dependence upon our Heavenly Father's help, and a hearty trust in His loving care, which *ought* to exist in us, and *must be* wrought in us, if the true condition of our being is to be attained, viz. that which is in accordance with the relation in which we truly stand to God. And therefore it follows that the petition lightly and heedlessly offered up, with scarce a thought as to whether it will really be accepted or no; or the supplication wrung by fear from the cold heart, which would, perhaps, relapse into indifference and practical unbelief, if the request were granted, and the cause of fear removed—cannot look to obtain an answer from God. And natural reason in itself might suggest also, that the answer to prayer may be withheld at

times for the very purpose of putting the reality of the faith of the suppliant to the proof, and testing whether there was indeed that entire well-grounded belief, which could repose in unfailing confidence on the power and love of God.

And thus, from whatever point of view the matter is regarded, it becomes clear that the fact of our petitions being sometimes, or even often, unanswered, is in no way whatever a valid objection against the general doctrine of the efficacy of prayer.

CHAPTER IX.

OF EXPERIENCE, AS CONFIRMING THE DOCTRINE OF THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

But while due allowance must be made for those cases in which prayer necessarily fails to meet with a reply, and due weight given to those considerations by which the reason for prayer being unanswered may be more or less explained, there still remains a large mass of evidence from experience in favour of the efficacy of prayer, which must not be entirely passed by; although our object here is rather to show how objections to the doctrine of prayer may be met, than to support it by direct proof.

Positive, certain, experimental proof, it must be remembered, as was said at the outset, we cannot, by the very nature of the case, possibly have. Even positive, probable proof, of the same kind *exactly* as that which belongs to practical, in contrast with physical matters—to which last certain proof is mainly confined—cannot be looked for in the case of prayer.

For we cannot, as we can do in the subjects of physical science, eliminate, or to a great extent, at least, eliminate, all other agencies but the one which we have in view, so as to discover with certainty whether it is the cause of the effect which we are tracing to its source. We cannot even mark the action of the agent in question in its combination with other agencies, which is all that is possible in practical matters, where we are unable to decompose the elements with which the agent in view is combined, and to note its working separately, as we can do in the case of the matters of the physical world. Even so much as this is not within our reach in the case of prayer; since prayer, of course, is not a cause in the sense in which natural agencies in the physical world (for example) are, i. e. as the media through which, as antecedents, the results following are produced. For prayer (granting that it is a cause) is so only as a means through which the action of an invisible agent is called forth. We can perceive by sense the antecedent and the consequent both, where a certain remedy is applied, and a certain result upon the health of the patient is produced. But the action of prayer (supposing it to be effectual) is clearly of a different kind; and, therefore, we cannot

exactly in the same way show the efficacy of prayer. But still, what we can find from experience with regard to it must be admitted in fairness to go far towards counterbalancing objections raised against it, and supporting the view—resting on its own proper grounds—of those who maintain the doctrine of the reasonableness and power of prayer. How far, on principles of reason, we have really any stronger grounds for believing the connexion between, say, a certain remedy and the effect produced, than for believing one to exist between prayer and a result following, is a deeper question, which cannot be discussed here.

We are to consider, then, here, how far experience does confirm the doctrine of the direct efficacy of prayer. Now, the modes of applying experiment and observation, (as all who have studied this branch of scientific inquiry are aware,) as the basis on which a superstructure of inductive reasoning is to be reared, may be set forth for the sake of clearness under some main forms—the "Experimental Methods," as they have been named. And, as we apply these one by one, Experience, in each case gives an answer, when the test is applied to her, in favour of the power of prayer. The chief principles of the Experimental Methods

are given formally and strictly in the admirable "Preliminary Discourse on Natural Philosophy" of Sir J. Herschel, and in the first volume of the "Logic" of Mr. J. S. Mill. In a less exact and popular way they may be stated thus: *First.* Where the presence of an antecedent is uniformly attended by the presence of something else following, there the first may be regarded as the cause of the second. *Second.* Where the absence of an antecedent is uniformly attended by the absence of something else following, there the first may be regarded as the cause of the second. The first of these is the method of agreement, and the second the method of difference. *Third.* Where the more fully and strongly a certain antecedent is present, the more the presence of something else follows; there the first may be considered the cause of the second. *Fourth.* Where, according to the degree in which a certain antecedent is absent, the absence of something else follows correspondently; there the first may be taken as the cause of the second. These last are the methods of concomitant variations. And, as these are applied one by one to the subject of prayer on the one hand, and the objects sought through it on the other, there is everything to indicate (so far as it can be) the con-

nexion between the two. We pray for some object, and it follows very generally, (with such limitations as were before explained,) upon our prayer. Blessings on his family and household, blessings on his friends and relations, blessings showered abundantly on himself, engolden the life of the man of prayer. Reversely, where prayer is neglected or despised, there is commonly found disorder and sorrow, even, perhaps, amid seeming prosperity. Children grow up to be a curse instead of a blessing; friends are alienated; and peace of mind is lost. And, further, it can hardly be denied by any one who will look the facts of experience fairly in the face, that just in the degree in which prayer, in the private chamber and in the household, abounds and grows in fervour, so do blessings more and more abound. As, on the contrary, in proportion to the neglect of prayer is the corresponding loss of that which goes to make up the happiness of man's social and domestic and individual life. Thus, attempt to explain the fact as we may, attempt as we may to deny that there is anything more than accidental coincidence in the relation between the two, it may well be held that the answer of experience, *when fairly tested,* is in favour of a connexion

between the prayers which men offer and the good which they receive.

And it is to be noticed that those who deny the power of prayer in other spheres, admit not uncommonly the efficacy of it in some particular sphere, in which, apparently, their own experience of it has given them confirmation of its power. One who could write that "the mind revolts from the ineffable arrogance and folly of petitions which would dictate to perfect goodness, and alter the order established by perfect wisdom," can yet go on to add, "Here we come to the prayer which is efficacious, to the domain in which prayer is all-powerful, and never fails of its answer; and that answer is not a matter of belief but of knowledge. He who has prayed in agony of soul, every fibre of his being quivering with dread of the cup presented to his lips, *knows* that his prayer is answered when the angels of strong patience and enduring faith descend into his heart, ministering the peace of perfect trust, till he can take the cup with unfaltering hand and drain it, saying only, 'Thy will, not mine, be done.' He who, in the dark storm of doubt or temptation, has prayed for light, only for light to see the truth and the right, *knows* that his prayer is answered when a path becomes visible, in which he is

constrained to tread, let it lead where it may. Those, again, to whom prayer 'is not only petition but communion,' they also know that their prayers are answered, when, in the stillness of morning or evening, in the hush of midnight, or the pause in the toil and turmoil of the day, they lift up their hearts to that Presence whose holiness shames all impurity, whose love shames all selfishness, whose ceaseless activity shames all faint-hearted sloth. To tell these that they first imagine the strength, the light, the help they are conscious of receiving, and then account for them by imagining a God who answers prayer, is neither a more nor a less valid argument than to say that we first imagine the impressions we are conscious of through our senses, and then invent an external world to account for them. The proof of the existence of a God in communion with the souls He has created, is of precisely the same kind as the proof of an external world, and is equally incapable of being demonstrated or disproved."

And here, in reference to experience as confirming belief in prayer, come in all those many testimonies to the value of prayer which Holy Scripture supplies. It matters not now what view be taken of the composition of the Book. Let it be regarded for the time simply in the

same light as any other book. And even so, how strong is the testimony afforded in it as to the efficacy of prayer; a testimony not expressed in words only, but supported by conduct evincing in many cases the sincerity of the belief of those who gave the testimony, that their prayer was indeed heard and answered by God.

The prayer of Hannah, and the blessing which followed; the prayer of Isaiah and Hezekiah, and the signal deliverance which was granted in reply; the prayer of Elisha, and the view which was granted to his servant in his fear; the prayer of Manasseh, who "humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him," whereupon "God was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom," whereby "Manasseh knew that the Lord He is God," are but a few among the many instances in Holy Scripture of the answers granted by God to prayer.

And David, Elijah, Hezekiah, Daniel, the Apostles of Christ—to adopt here the thoughts of another, respecting these and similar instances of answer to prayer—were not the victims of an illusion, in virtue of which they connected particular events which would have

happened in any event with prayer that preceded them. They who never pray, or who never pray with the humility, confidence, and importunity, that wins its way to the heart of God, cannot speak from experience as to the effects of prayer; nor are they in a position to give credit, with generous simplicity, to those who can. But, at least, on such a subject as this, the voice of the whole company of God's servants may be held to counterbalance a few *à priori* surmises or doctrines; and it is the very heart of humanity itself which, from age to age, mounts up with the Psalmist to the Eternal Throne: "O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come!"

To sum up now the whole argument from experience as to the efficacy of prayer, it must be admitted, I think, that no inference can be drawn in its favour in the way of direct proof—such proof, i.e., as we can have respecting matters which are directly objects of sense. And this for two reasons. *First*, because prayer is no immediate antecedent on which something follows, in the way in which one object of sense is an antecedent of another consequent upon it, as a certain medicine may be followed by a certain new condition of health. It can only be the *known* antecedent of a certain *known*

result; the intermediate intervention of a Higher Power, acted on by the prayer, and bringing about the effect, being something which is supposed, but which it is impossible, by the very nature of the case, to *know*, except as a matter of Revelation, and, therefore, a point of religious belief. And, *secondly*, because moral considerations must be admitted to enter into, and blend with, and influence, to an indefinite extent, the actual supplication made, and must necessarily be taken into account in weighing experimentally the efficacy of prayer. All that experience can be expected to test strictly is, the uniformity of answers to prayer; and that uniformity the believer in prayer never expects. There may be, probably there are, countless prayers offered up, which yet may strictly be reckoned as no prayers (really) at all, in estimating experimentally the results of prayer. Vain petitions, prayers of those who are not trying to conform to the Divine Will, mere *formulated* prayers, such as those for large classes of men, which often are offered with no sincerity of heart by men in general at all—*experimental* prayers, (as I may call them,) such as those which it has been seriously proposed to offer for certain persons, as for the sick in a hospital, in order

to put God's answer to prayer to the proof, without that real belief in His willingness to hear and answer our petitions, which is a very condition of true prayer—all such prayers, and the like, must be viewed as not entering into the question of the efficacy of prayer at all.

And the practical result of the whole, I imagine, will be this. Those who desire, on their grounds, to deny the efficacy of prayer, will find enough on their side in experience to seem to justify them in their view. While those, on the other hand, who, by the instincts of nature, or education, or Divine teaching, have been led to trust confidently in the power of prayer, will find little or nothing in the results of experience to make them surrender their belief. On the contrary, they will find everywhere, in their own experience and in the recorded experience of others, evidence that true, faithful prayer is always (so far as it may be) answered by God. And thus the argument from experience respecting prayer may be summed up practically in the illogical form: Pray faithfully, and you will assuredly find prayer so effectual as to confirm your faith, though you may not be able to produce in others a conviction like your own.

And this, perhaps, is the utmost which a

believer can expect to find. He knows that he is to walk by faith and not by sight: he marks the inherent difficulties which exist every way as to answers to prayer: he recognizes the impossibility, from the nature of the case, of absolute proof from experience as to the validity of prayer: he is content in this, as in other things, to look for a light shining in a dark place, not so strong as to flash conviction on those whose view is resolutely fixed on earth, but yet bright enough to guide those whose eye is always turned upward, looking for light to guide and cheer them in their aspirations and their endeavours to ascend upward, and live day by day nearer to God.

CHAPTER X.

ON PRAYER IN RELATION TO HUMAN EXERTION.

It can hardly be called a difficulty in the way of belief in the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer, that it may be represented as opposed to, and having a natural tendency to stand in the way of, human exertion. It can at most be viewed as a practical objection to the validity of prayer, as if it superseded human diligence and foresight; and therefore could not really be designed to hold a place in that order of things in which so much is placed within the reach, and made dependent on the energy, of man's own powers, as a fact. Are we to sit with folded hands, (the doubter loves to insinuate), and pray that one who is ill may be restored to health, instead of using all the means in our power for his recovery; or that some pestilence may be withdrawn, or its course, as it approaches, arrested, while we do nothing to remove those conditions which tend to develope it, or to strengthen its virulence when

produced? Are we to pray that some evil corruption which is destroying mysteriously our cattle or the fruits of the earth may be removed, instead of applying ourselves diligently to discover, if possible, the seat of the evil, and the circumstances under which it is diminished or increased, in order to learn what remedies may be availing to remove it, or at least to lessen its force?

To all such objections it would be obvious to answer that this is an entire misrepresentation of the teaching of those who inculcate the value of prayer. "It is by prayer, in union with exertion," one writes[1], "that we obtain our ends and objects. Prayer, without exertion, is mockery; exertion, without prayer for a blessing on exertion, is profaneness." "God in His wondrous condescension," writes another[2], "willeth the free co-operation of man. He willeth, in human things as in Divine, that we should use to the utmost the powers and capacities which He has lodged in us, yet not as if we were lords, not He, but in blessed dependence upon Himself. 'Act and pray' (in Ravignan's words): 'pray and act;' expect all

[1] Dean Hook, "Lives of the Archbishops," vol. ix. p. 437.

[2] Dr. Pusey, "Miracles of Prayer," p. 19.

of God, yet neglect neither care, nor desire, nor efforts. This order is wise, is grand, is beautiful. It comprises the economy of Providence, the very condition of His government, the covenant of God with man." And the teaching of Scripture is exactly the same. With a fearless boldness which does not stay to reconcile apparent contrarieties, it at once bids us, "In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God," and promises that "whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive;" and yet at the same time it is full of exhortations "to use all diligence;" it bids us not to be laggards, but earnest in doing our appointed work in the world.

And there is, therefore, no contradiction at least between the teaching and the practice of those who forbid us to separate the exertions of duty from trust in God and prayer to Him. And so, practically, in the foremost ranks of those who have been steady, diligent workers for God and the good of their fellow-men, are found those who have been also the most constant and earnest in prayer. Missionaries, who have laboured in teaching and preaching as if all depended upon themselves, while yet they were instant in prayer, as looking only to

the blessing of God upon their endeavours for success: teachers, who have devoted their utmost energies to the instruction and formation of the character of the young, while living, and teaching others to live, in a constant sense of the overshadowing presence of God, and of the power of prayer to obtain His help: benefactors of mankind in all times, who have given their hours of labour to unremitting effort, while they none the less implored God's blessing on their work in hours of rest—all prove that, practically, exertion need not be separated from prayer.

But still it may be contended that the teaching and the practice of men are in error alike; that there is, in the nature of the things themselves, a radical inconsistency between exertion and prayer. If a thing is to be obtained by man's exertion, how can it be the subject of prayer? If it is to be given as the result of prayer, what place is there for man's exertion in order that it may be gained? But the argument here is by no means a sound one. Prayer is not incompatible with exertion. The exercise of human energy and human ingenuity leaves abundant room for prayer.

For there are, in fact, many ways in which the assistance of a higher power outside our-

selves may be beneficial, if not absolutely necessary, in order to make our exertions of any avail. The very power of exertion depends on a condition of mental and bodily vigour, the maintenance of which is by no means wholly within our own control. And, so far as it does rest with our own selves, it depends on circumstances very much whether we have the knowledge of the means necessary to maintain that vigour, or the power or the will to use them when known. And through prayer—granting, for the time, that it is effectual—these circumstances may be overruled for good for ourselves or for others for whom we pray. Then, further, the success of our exertions depends in great measure on the condition of those things upon which our energy is put forth; as all the efforts of the husbandman, e. g., may be baffled by atmospheric or other influences affecting the corn; or the utmost endeavours to train a child well may be frustrated through the indolence or bad conduct of the child. And here, again, accordingly, exertion may well be accompanied by prayer. And even in those matters which rest mainly on a man's own self, and depend less on external circumstances, as in points of practical judgment and the conduct of speculative inquiry, so subtle are the

influences by which we are affected, so mysterious altogether is the action of thought, that after the most careful mental training, in combination with well-regulated meditation and patient, diligent research, there is still abundant room for the interposition of the aid of a Higher Power, guiding, stimulating, assisting thought; and that in answer to man's prayer.

Thus the labour of the energetic and self-reliant may well be attended by prayer. And, reversely, the prayer of the devout and the trustful may be, nay, should be, accompanied by effort. It may be that one reason why prayer is not in many cases directly answered, and our request is not directly granted, in the particular form in which it is made, is that we may be taught to combine exertion with prayer. If our prayers were always exactly and literally granted, we should naturally be led to rest entirely on prayer, and should fail to exercise and develope those physical, intel lectual, and moral powers which are called into activity and disciplined by man's exertion with a view to the supply of his higher and lower needs. Industry and perseverance, foresight and self-control, powers of observation and memory, of imagination and reasoning, are cultivated through exertion with a view to the

attainment of our ends. And the need for this exertion might be withdrawn, were prayer answered otherwise than it is. Oh! the wisdom of the order wherewith the Beneficent Ruler of our world has appointed that prayer and exertion should harmoniously blend, and each supply that element in the cultivation of our higher being which the other fails to give! If exertion were all, without prayer, we might fall into an earthly state of simple self-reliance, and the spiritual part of our nature might be neglected, not being lifted up continually to God in prayer. If prayer sufficed alone, without exertion, we should have no need to cultivate a great part of our nature, and should be in danger of degenerating through carelessness and sloth.

CHAPTER XI.

ON PRAYER IN RELATION TO MAN'S SPIRITUAL LIFE.

The difficulties which have been considered in the foregoing chapters have reference mainly to the doctrine of God's interposition in answer to prayer *in respect to the material world*. There it is especially that a fixed order is seen established. There it is that any interference with that fixed order seems impossible, or improbable at the least. The case is somewhat different with regard to our inner spiritual life. Its course is regulated by such mysterious laws: such subtle influences affect it; its condition appears so different in the cases of different men, the chords of one man's inner being responding at once to a touch which is wholly powerless in the case of another to wake up any note of response—that there seems more room for the possibility of Divine interposition here. But then the greater the supposed possibility of interposition, the more difficult is all approach to proof of it as a fact.

In the case of a storm, e. g., we may know that prayer was offered, and we may know too that the storm was allayed: the two facts are definitely known, though there remains the doubt (on grounds of human reason) as to the connexion between the two. But in spiritual matters, as in the case of prayer for the conversion of another to God, or for victory over some besetting sin, the result is commonly so secret and gradual that it is really more difficult, except on a believer's grounds, to maintain that the one is related to the other as an effect to its cause.

The wonderful works of Christ, accordingly, were wrought in great measure in the sphere of material things. The lepers were cleansed; the paralytic were healed; the tempest was allayed; the ears of the deaf were opened, and the blind were restored to sight. Sometimes the mere knowledge of the need of those around Him was enough to call forth the compassion and the power of the Saviour, as when He fed the multitudes in the wilderness, or raised the son of the widow of Nain to life. Sometimes the desire was just faintly intimated, and the half-expressed wish was fulfilled, as when the words were uttered by His mother at Cana, "They have no wine." While sometimes,

again, the petition was expressly made, and answered, as when the Centurion of Capernaum sent his friends to beseech Christ's aid for his servant, or when the nobleman came in person and besought Him to come down and heal his son. As if to show that God is indeed willing to give us more than we either desire or deserve, as well as to grant the desires of our hearts and the prayers of our lips—"our desires and petitions," as it is expressed in our service—when we ask faithfully in accordance with His will. And they who witnessed these wonderful works of Christ, had in them an evidence that Divine power rested with Him Who was able to perform them, and that He was drawn to the performance of them by a consciousness of the needs, and by the influence of the desires and prayers of men :—an evidence of fact so clear and indisputable that it could only be opposed by blind, obstinate resistance to the conviction which it was fairly calculated to produce. Thus the works of Christ were wrought in the sphere of outward, sensible things, when He would give evidential proof of His Divine power, and of His willingness to hear and answer prayer.

And yet these were but signs given in the sphere of external things of God's power over the secret invisible things of man's inner being,

and His willingness to interpose there in answer to man's prayers. And these last are far greater, mightier works. Easier, indeed, in one sense, they are—as those probably would have answered to whom our Lord put the question, "Whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee: or to say, Take up thy bed and walk?"—easier, as not being so capable of being disproved, since they do not come within the domain of sense: but really far harder, as affecting the moral and spiritual elements of man's being, and the relations of man to God. "Which are greatest," it has been well said, "the miracles of nature or the miracles of grace? Which is the greatest interference, (to use man's word,) to change passive, unresisting nature, or man's strong, energetic, resisting will, which God Himself so respects that He will not force the will which He has endowed with freedom, that it might have the bliss freely to choose Himself? Which is the mightiest, noblest work, to condense, if so be, the operations of nature, and change the water into wine, without the intervening process of its passing through the vine, or to change the wolf into the lamb, the blasphemer and constrainer to blaspheme into the Apostle, the persecutor of Jesus into His disciple, into

him to whom to live was Christ and to be crucified with Christ, who became the servant of all that he might win the more to Christ and to life? or, again, to change the slave of degrading passion, its fires yet unspent, into the saint; the spirit entangled in the wild, God-degrading fanaticism of the Manichees into the clear, God-enlightened teacher and oracle of the Church, now for 1400 years?

"Or again, to take the greatest miracle in the province of nature, which is the greatest—to recall into the body the departed soul, to reanimate it again for a few years, and then again (except in the case of our Lord) to depart from it until the Resurrection at the great day, or to transform the soul, dead in its sins, into the life of God, to gain for it a life which shall never die, a brightness and brilliancy of Divine life which shall never fade, an union with God which the dissolution of the body from the soul shall not dissolve nor interrupt, but which shall live on for ever, to be perfected in the beatific vision of Himself, and the never-ending, ever-unfolding communication of Himself throughout all eternity? Truly these are greater works. For deeper-seated is spiritual blindness than bodily, more malignant and more inveterate are the diseases of the soul than those of the body. A small

thing it were to restore the hearing of the outward ear, compared with the healing of that inward deafness whereby a person is, by man incurably, deaf to the voice of God. A small thing is it to make one lame from his mother's womb to walk, notable as the miracle was, compared to that infusion of Divine strength which, running through the whole moral frame, heals the paralysis of the sin-stricken soul, empowers the enthralled will, enables it to trample on the sin which held it fast motionless to good, and gladly and freely, self-sacrificing, to run the way of the all-holy law of the love of God.

"And yet these stupendous spiritual miracles are daily renewed. The love of the Church, of the Pastor, of the mother, the combined prayers of those whom God has inspired with the love of souls, draw down on the prodigal soul many a wasted or half-wasted grace, until at last God in His providence has laid open the soul to the influence of His grace, and the soul, obstructing no more the access to Divine grace, is converted to God, and lives. These are spiritual facts as certain in the history of souls as any other facts are in the province of science[1]."

Thus, to a believer, the miraculous works performed by Christ are an outward assurance

[1] Dr. Pusey, "Miracles of Prayer," pp. 6—8.

that He can and will perform the still greater works which influence man's higher spiritual being, in accordance with His word. And then, reversely, the consciousness that a mighty spiritual influence is being put forth upon him, in answer to his prayers, empowering him more and more to conquer evil, and drawing him up more and more into a higher sphere, reacts on and strengthens his assurance of power being manifested from time to time in outward nature by God.

And, in a similar way, he who considers the matter on grounds of reason alone, finding that the difficulties which present themselves on the surface against the supposition that God may interpose in the events of outward nature in answer to man's prayer vanish very much when fairly weighed, may look with greater confidence to obtain Divine assistance in the cultivation of his higher being, and the work of his spiritual life. And then, discovering there strength given in his weakness, and guidance in his difficulties, and comfort and peace amid trials and sorrows; feeling too empowered to live more and more a higher life, in proportion to the growing frequency and earnestness of his prayers, he can come back with a fuller conviction that God does indeed interpose with the

secret touch of His almighty power, in such ways and at such times as may seem good to Him, ordering the course of outward events so as to meet the desires of those who faithfully pray to Him, and yet without any interruption of the fixed order which He has wisely and beneficently appointed in the world.

And here, in spiritual, as in material things, experience gives evidence enough to confirm the believer, enough too (according to the nature of the case) to satisfy the fair inquirer after truth: but not enough to compel conviction, and render those who obstinately resist it absolutely without excuse. And according to the degree in which the spiritual life is cultivated, is the amount of conviction which experience will afford. As it is in intellectual matters: the higher, more cultivated intellects are open to a thousand influences, and find thoughts flashing upon them in a thousand unexpected ways, and have avenues open along which suggestions enter, such as are wanting in the cases of inferior and untutored minds: so it is in spiritual things as well. To the spiritually-minded, to those who live much in communion with God—it matters not under what circumstances and in what sphere—there comes a delicate appreciation and a fine sensi-

tiveness, which seems at once to make them more open to the reception of Divine impressions, and also more ready to refer them to their true source.

One thing only God will not do. He will not *force* conviction, any more than He will constrain the will. For good or for evil, He has made us to be free; and that at once in our actions and in our beliefs. He gives us help in our actions and our wills for our good; and will give us more and more help if we seek it from Him, and use well that which He gives. If we will resist Him for evil, the fault lies with ourselves. And it is so with our beliefs too. He gives us light to guide us, a light from Reason and from Revelation combined: for truth, like light, is the result of many elements harmoniously blending into one. And He will give us more and more light, if we seek it fairly and earnestly, and make good use of the light which He gives. But He will not, commonly, force conviction upon us, if we resolutely, in pride or in prejudice, close our eyes against the truth. May we not apply it as, indirectly, an acted parable, while we recognize the immediate purpose of the act, that one had his eyes closed for a season, when he had long steadily refused to admit one portion of Divine light?

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE ORIGIN OF THE BELIEF IN THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

One question still remains to be considered, viz. what is the origin of the idea of the efficacy of prayer? Whence has it arisen? How are we to account for the notion of prayer as having power to influence the Great Ruler of the universe, and to draw down a blessing from Him, which is so very generally prevalent in the world? Is it derived from natural instinct? Or is it simply the result of instruction and example, each one training others to pray, and spreading by his example the idea of the power of prayer? Can it be said with truth that "the desire for prayer is simply a creation of theologians; so that the savage does not pray by natural inclination, but the missionary *teaches* him to pray; and as, at the same time, he preaches to him on the existence of a God who listens to

prayer, precept to pray is a logical sequence of that instruction"?

Now all questions as to what are natural instincts or natural intuitions must, by the very nature of the case, be very difficult, if not impossible, to solve. The development of our inner moral and intellectual being, as of our outward physical frame, is so gradual, and the influences which act upon it are so complex, that it is most hard to discover what is the result of culture simply, and what is innate. The ideas of the intellect, and the affections of the heart, do not come into existence *full-blown*, so to say, any more than our faculties are given to us perfect at the first; and it is difficult to trace back to their original principles the full and comprehensive knowledge, the high and noble feelings, of the well-trained man, just as it is hard to refer back the plant or the tree in its fully developed strength and beauty to the primary germs in which all took its rise. Or to use another illustration, as the majestic river rolls on, fed by a thousand tributaries, we cannot mark in its waters the exact elements derived from the original spring. Analogies such as these illustrate the difficulty of analyzing our thoughts and feelings, and discovering what exactly is

due to elements given in our very being from the first. Even those who hold the doctrine of innate ideas—of ideas, i. e., pre-existent in the mind anterior to experience—yet have to admit that these are at least called forth and developed by experience, as the *condition* of their existence, if not their *source*. And, in a similar way, if there are feelings and affections implanted in our nature, impelling us to a certain course, and drawing us towards certain objects to which they are adapted, yet these too require to be elicited and disciplined by exercise and guidance amid the circumstances of life.

It must be understood, then, to be simply out of our power, by the nature of the case, to *prove* absolutely either that the idea of prayer is, or is not, an original instinct. All that can be done is, to weigh such considerations as may be adduced in favour of one or the other view.

And in favour of the view that prayer rests on a natural instinct may fairly be brought forward the very general, if not the universal, prevalence of the idea of the efficacy of prayer. "All men, it would seem," wrote the Heathen moralist, "all who have even some small share of wisdom, do always in all that they set

about, be it a great matter or a small, call on God for His help[1]." And to this must be applied the principle of the other great philosopher of Greece, that "what all men accept, that we hold to be the truth[2]." Or, as it is expressed by Hooker, "the general and perpetual voice of men is as the sentence of God Himself. For that which all men have at all times learned nature herself must needs have taught; and God being the author of nature, her voice is but His instrument[3]." We can hardly mark men everywhere, or almost everywhere, pouring forth their petitions to God, with much, it may be, of folly and extravagance in the manner of it intermixed, without concluding that the desire for prayer is either a natural instinct of man's being, or, at least, in harmony with his instincts, and capable of being connected in the chain of natural sequence with them.

For it is only throwing the matter one step farther back, to view prayer as the result rather of man's natural idea of God. Be it

[1] Ἀλλ' ὦ Σώκρατες, τοῦτό γε δὴ πάντες, ὅσοι καὶ κατὰ βραχυ σωφροσύνης μετέχουσιν, ἐπὶ πάσῃ ὁρμῇ καὶ σμικροῦ καὶ μεγάλου πράγματος θεὸν ἀεί που καλοῦσι. Plat. Tim. iii. 27.

[2] Ὃ γὰρ πᾶσι δοκεῖ, τοῦτ' εἶναι φαμέν.

[3] Eccl. Pol. I. viii. 3.

so, that we view it rather as following naturally from the conception which we form of Him, and from that "known relation which God hath unto us as children, and unto all good things as unto effects whereof Himself is the principal Cause[4]," whence we are led to seek of Him in prayer those things which we trust He will give us as a loving Father, and which we know He can give us as God; then this will but make prayer to be founded on a natural conception of God, resulting in the way of regular consequence from it, instead of its being, as we should rather ourselves believe it to be, an instinct implanted in its germ in our nature itself.

It is urged, however, that this desire for prayer is really only the result of instruction and example, the generality of which causes us to mistake the nature of the belief in the efficacy of prayer, as if it were a natural instinct, instead of looking on it as a mere matter of education, which it really is. But this view puts out of sight altogether the fact that this very tendency to instruct others to pray, this very example of prayer by which others are led to it, must itself have had its

[4] Hooker, Eccl. Pol. I. viii. 7.

origin in some source. Who first taught those to pray by whose instruction others everywhere are being influenced now? Was the origin of prayer a mere delusion in the minds of some? If so, how can we account for the prevalence of the delusion, and the power which it has gained among men? If it is not an error, but something which approves itself to mankind at large, whence did the idea of prayer, and the belief in its power, take its rise?

It may indeed be answered to this, as it is answered practically, that the idea is owing to "theologians," i. e. to those who take Revelation as their guide, and instruct others in that which, as derived by themselves from Scripture, they believe to be the truth. Still, from whence is the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer, as inculcated throughout in the Bible, derived? Granted that the Bible is written under the inspiration of God, then the doctrine has the highest possible sanction, as being commanded, or, we should rather say, permitted to man by the express revelation of God Himself. But, supposing the Bible to be a mere human composition, then the same difficulty arises as before. How comes it that those by whom it was composed should all, with one

consent, have taught the value of prayer, and throughout unhesitatingly implied its efficacy —and that, not as if it were their own private belief only, but as being an accepted point of universal national belief—if prayer had no root in man's true being, if it were only the creation of a distempered imagination, the result of fear, and weakness, and credulity combined?

Still it is argued that prayer stands on the same level with "obedience to dreams, incantations, and witchcraft," and the like, "which *are* intuitive;" from which it is inferred that even our instincts or intuitions cannot be trusted; that they may lead us into error as much as into truth. Now, apart from any question as to whether such beliefs *are* intuitive, I think it may be safely contended that any very generally prevailing opinion will be found commonly, if not always, to have some groundwork of truth as its basis, however much of error may be intermixed in the superstructure which is reared upon it. And it is thus no real argument against the validity of prayer to contend that other beliefs too have prevailed widely, which yet, in the form in which they were maintained in times of ignorance, may call forth the ridicule of wiser

times. As neither is it any disproof of the true idea lying at the root of the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer that it too has been much perverted, directed to wrong objects, employed for ends which were foolish, and exercised in superstitious ways. Rather, perhaps, it should be viewed as a proof of its intrinsic vitality, that, amid such perversions, it has still maintained its ground. Hidden among rubbish which has obscured its beauty, the jewel itself has remained unimpaired.

On the whole, therefore, I think, on grounds of reason, the result is in favour of the view that prayer is the result of a natural instinct of man's being, though requiring, like all other natural instincts—nay more, like all natural faculties—to be called forth into exercise, and disciplined, under the guidance of progressive experience and illumination, with a view to its proper use. And when we view man as called into being by the will of the Great Creator, who has been pleased to give him faculties which raise him above the other orders of created things on the earth, and not only bring him into special likeness to God Himself, but also endue him with the power of thinking of God, and loving Him, and desiring to live in communion with Him; when we reflect

further, that man, so constituted, is yet made subject during his life on earth to circumstances on which his existence, and the vigour of his being in every part of it, depend, so that, with his utmost exertions, he yet cannot, beyond a certain bound, provide that which is necessary for himself and for others—regarding man thus constituted, thus placed, we can hardly conceive an All-wise and All-beneficent Creator to have launched him into being, without imparting to the immortal spirit which He was sending forth into existence an instinct which should lead him, when rightly trained, to that very communion with God for which his nature was adapted, that expression of his wants to God, by which not only a supply for his necessities would be obtained, but also the highest qualities of his being would be educated, and his true position in the universe be maintained.

Still, all these thoughts—all the views of the foregoing pages—are but surmises after all. Reason can but go a little way. The more carefully we meditate on her principles, the more we feel how little she is able to guide us along the path of inquiry as to the things of the higher world, and the relation between them and man on earth. "Where shall wisdom be

found?" is the question which the mind, pursuing these inquiries, naturally asks. And thus reason becomes the handmaid to faith. The natural understanding admits that she can do no more than weigh the difficulties which the natural understanding has raised. She can but lead us by the hand to the school of Divine wisdom, there to learn what God has been pleased to reveal of Himself and our relation to Him, there to confirm when true, there to correct when erroneous, those points of belief respecting God and our own higher being, which, from whatever source derived, have obtained currency among mankind. And over the very portals of that school it may be said to be written, so that each one as he enters may read the words, "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," as the charter of promise, the ground on which may rest securely our belief respecting the efficacy of prayer.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF PRAYER.

THE object of the preceding chapters has been to consider the difficulties which may be raised on grounds of reason alone to the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer, and the manner in which they may be solved. There remains one aspect of the subject of prayer to which a few pages may well be devoted, namely, the *subjective* influence of prayer, as it would technically be called: i. e. the influence which prayer has a natural tendency to exercise upon those by whom it is offered up. Here we breathe a serener atmosphere. We have passed out of the region of controversy and doubt. Even those who strenuously deny the direct, actual power of prayer, as a means of obtaining Divine interposition, at least in the sphere of outward nature, where all seems to them unalterably fixed, yet do quite admit that it may, by a sort of natural reaction, exercise a very

powerful influence on the minds and hearts of those who pray.

And yet, pleasing as the illusion is here, beneficial as it may be, as preventing those who are under its influence from giving up prayer altogether, which they otherwise might be induced to do:—still in the interests of truth it must be admitted that such a view is but an illusion after all. The position is really quite untenable. And however sound it may seem for a time, this view of prayer must eventually give way under a stricter criticism; and, with it, the whole doctrine of the efficacy of prayer may seem to be destroyed. For if prayer in itself, as the supplication offered to a Higher Being, is held to be a thing unreasonable and unreal, the very idea of offering it must, eventually, be seen to be unmeaning; and, with that, its moral influence, or influence on those who offer it, must cease too. Destroy the real validity of prayer, and its moral power must at length be destroyed. It can be only so long as natural instincts or the results of training maintain their ground against the theories of the intellect, only so long as there do linger some convictions as to the real, actual power of prayer—that it can have any reality to the mind of him who

offers it, and so act upon him with a moral force.

But, on the contrary, once admit the real, direct power of prayer; grant, that it can indeed influence the will of that mighty moral Being by whom the universe was created, and by Whom it is from hour to hour sustained and ruled; allow that blessings which we desire may be granted, and evils which we deprecate be removed, or a gentle but powerful influence be exercised on our moral being whereby the whole character of it may gradually be changed and raised — once admit this, more or less, with such limitations even as one or another may think fit to set to the range of his own individual belief in the efficacy of prayer, and prayer, thus real, thus *trustworthy*, is found to react with a great and comprehensive power on all the sides of our moral and spiritual character and life.

Rising, then, above the world in the midst of which he moves, man is lifted up in spirit into a higher sphere. At one time he may look on the things of earth as a veil through and beyond which he can gaze by faith on God. At another time he may view them rather as a mirror, wherein are manifested in some degree the glorious attributes of God. But in all

things God is more or less constantly before the view of his spirit, which is drawn up by communion with Him in prayer. The work of life, however high or however humble be the sphere in which he is placed, is seen as a duty to be performed for God, a discipline through which the spirit is being prepared for an eternal life with Him. The things of earth—with their beauty, their use, their adaptation to the end which they are intended to serve—are regarded as showing forth the goodness and the wisdom of God. The life and the force, of which the working appears on all sides, is to him the visible sign of the outflow of Divine Power from the Spirit of Life. And thus the danger to which man is liable of being drawn away from the thought of God by those very things which should continually bring Him before our view, is being constantly counteracted for us by prayer. And thus, first, the value of prayer is seen as lifting up the immortal spirit into that higher sphere which is congenial to its true being, and in which it should habitually dwell, and thereby preparing it on earth for its future eternal home. And how much it does this may, perhaps, be seen most strikingly by contrast in the lives, becoming more and more earthly in their

view, of those who have ceased to be men of prayer.

A second great service performed by prayer is one which is not, I think, commonly recognized, its power, namely, as a means of producing union among men. The social character of man, his need of society as a condition under which the powers of his higher nature are to be developed, was noted by the Greek philosophers long ago. And all that which helps to draw men together more and more in the bonds of true and lasting union, all which tends to prevent the disintegration of families and communities and states, which other causes have a tendency to produce, may be regarded as a benefit to mankind at large. And just such an agency is to be found in a special degree in prayer. For prayer, lifting up the mind to higher things, in the way described before, removes to a great extent the selfishness which is fostered by allowing the mind to become engrossed with things around. And then, the barrier to the outflow of regard and love for others being withdrawn the heart is free to sympathize with the joys and the sorrows of others, and consider their interests, and forego its own pleasure or advantage for the sake of others, and put forth those

many little acts of courtesy and considerateness by which, more, perhaps, than by greater things, the union of man with man and class with class is maintained. And this feeling of love and regard for others is further strengthened in us by the sense that their prayers are going up to Heaven for the same blessings, in great measure, for which we pray ourselves; nay, more, that we, either individually, or at least as members of a class, are being continually remembered by them before God in their prayers. And thus a second aspect of the value of prayer is, as producing and maintaining union among men.

Great, too, is the encouragement and support amid the trials and difficulties of life which naturally flows from prayer. For very inciting and stimulating to exertion it is to feel that all our work is being done for God, that it has been presented beforehand to Him, and is being carried on as in His presence, as a tribute to Him, in the employment for Him of the faculties which He has given, the life which He from hour to hour sustains. And thus is obtained the one high motive which never fails. Self-interest, love of power or fame, benevolence, and desire for the good of others—all these motives lose at times their

force. The desire to fulfil our duty to God, the love of pleasing Him by the right use of the power which He has bestowed—this motive never fails; it rather grows stronger as earthly things pass away, and we draw near to eternity, and look forward to being with Him from Whom we have derived our being, and from Whom we hope to receive our reward. And, as prayer thus incites us to exertion, so it also lends a great moral support to the spirit when engaged in its work. How much additional confidence is gained when we can feel, not only that our own powers are being to the utmost fairly and diligently put forth, but also that we can hope for a blessing upon our work from God aiding our efforts and directing their ultimate issues at His will! How much of the evil effect of worry and uncertainty and rivalry and disappointment would many a broken spirit have been spared, if it could but have really felt that it was working for God, and with God; and that its true end could not but be gained, under all circumstances—its endeavour, namely, to do the best it could for Him! In times of danger, too, it has been noticed that a special firmness and fearlessness may be inspired by the consciousness of having sought God's help in prayer.

Thus it is related of the late Bishop Patteson, that on one occasion he felt assured of the treachery of the natives who were guiding him to their Chief: "Uneasiness took possession of him, and he feared for his life. Presently he came to an abandoned hut, and for a few minutes he left his guides; and those moments he employed on his knees in prayer. The effect, he used to relate, of thus commending himself to his Divine Father, soul and body, was wonderful; all fear left him, and he came out of the hut regardless of consequences." "The effect upon his treacherous guides," it is added—though that is not to our present point, "was no less wonderful; they gradually ceased to plot; and at last one of them turned, confessed the treachery, and offered to lead him back to his boat in safety." So great is the power of prayer to produce confidence in those by whom it is trustfully and heartily offered up.

And the same power which is thus seen as influencing man on the more active side of his being, appears equally as giving him succour on the passive side as well. Humility, and patient endurance in resignation to God's will, under the assurance that all is being ordered for the best by the care of a loving Father, are virtues

which naturally spring up and grow through prayer. We have put our case into His hands: we have used all the diligence, all the skill, all the means which lay in our own power: and we can rest secure in His care as being sure that He will give us that which we desire, so far as is compatible with the laws of His perfect justice, and the wider scheme of the universe, and the order which He has established in the world: sure, too, that so far as the desire of our heart cannot be granted, He will make all things to turn to the true good of those who, in singleness of heart, rest their whole trust on Him.

This subject of the moral influence of prayer might be carried on to an almost indefinite extent. This "breath of the spirit" might be viewed in its bearings on all the parts of our moral and spiritual being, just as the action of the natural breath might be regarded as affecting all the various sides of our physical life. But we will not pursue the matter farther. Even to what has been suggested so far the words of the great Greek historian's panegyric over the dead, as put into the mouth of Pericles, may be felt to apply. Those who do not know the value of prayer may consider what is said as exaggerated; while, reversely, to those who

do know its power by experience, what has been said may be viewed as falling very far short of the full truth.

I feel, in closing the volume, that I have been able to proceed myself, and to lead those who may be at the pains to follow me, only to the outskirts of the subject after all. The consideration of the difficulties which may be honestly raised as to the efficacy of prayer, and the manner in which those difficulties may fairly be met—all, as far as possible, from an unbeliever's point of view—cannot carry us into the heart of the matter. The value of prayer, direct and indirect, spreads out into vast ranges of our being; its foundations are laid far down in depths out of sight, to which such difficulties do not reach at all. Above the subject of prayer, we feel, there stretches away before the mind of the believer a view ever rising higher and extending farther of that communion with God in heaven which really constitutes prayer, as full of blessing, temporal and spiritual, direct and indirect, as raising and purifying and strengthening man's highest being, and as maintaining, by a thousand intricate links of connexion, the relation between man and God. While beneath it, again, as the foundations on which it is reared, lie the

deep questions as to man's instincts and principles, the ground of his knowledge of God and of himself, and so of the foundations generally of his moral and spiritual belief—perhaps we must add even of his belief in the existence of outward nature, and of the uniformity of its laws, of which—and of which only—they feel so sure, who would deny the reasonableness and the efficacy of prayer.

I have tried to keep to my prescribed limits, and neither to preach a homily on the inestimable value of prayer generally, nor to enter on those deeper matters which are apart from, though they underlie, the subject of prayer.

But for some benefit to be derived even from the considerations which have been advanced in this volume, I would look still. The difficulties which are felt sincerely by some, and only dimly hinted at as difficulties of overwhelming magnitude by others, have been stated, I hope, in their exact truth. And thus their real force may more easily be examined; while such help towards their honest examination will have been given, as it was in the writer's power to afford. And if it is found that their weight is not great, especially when counter-balanced by arguments which may be adduced on the other side, the candid mind will be better prepared to come to

those deeper truths on which the validity of prayer must ultimately be made to rest. He will, at least, not be biassed against them as maintaining, what he fancies to be untenable, the doctrine of the Efficacy of Prayer.

Further, the consideration of the subject even thus far cannot fail to bring about a deeper conviction of the vast importance of the matter, and the great issues which it involves. On a true view of it may depend the enjoyment of incalculable blessings in respect of our physical and moral welfare, if God does indeed direct the course of events, and accepts our worship of Him, and communion with Him, and influences our moral being in answer to our prayers for others and for ourselves. Certainly, with the denial of the power of prayer, all the great and varied influence of communion with a higher, unseen Being must be lost too. And also, if prayer is surrendered, our faith must be given up. "If prayer is not answered, and cannot be answered" (it has been truly said), "then there is in the Christian, or rather in the religious sense of the word, no God:" our belief in God, and the Revelation of Him which we accept, and the religious instincts of our nature, (if there be such,) confirmed and guided by it—all fade away. We are left in that

dreary state, in which the sceptic would triumphantly place us, with all beyond this present visible world as a "*terra incognita*;" all else, all belief in God, and Providence, and prayer, wisely put aside as "the baseless products of human speculation." Here, then, is the alternative. A hard, earthly life, on the one hand, without any knowledge of God, or communion with Him, in the midst of a fixed chain of events, an unalterable course of nature, in which we are to play our part for a short period; with, at best, but human affection and earthly refinement, to cheer and elevate us; and no view of a world beyond this. Or, on the other hand, a life raised and purified by the thought of God and communion with Him, cheered, supported, stimulated by the conviction that we are watched over by His care, and that His superintending Providence orders the course of nature, so as yet not to interrupt its ordinary laws; with the hope of an eternal existence with Him, when this life, with its trials, and sorrows, and inequalities, has passed away.

It is well at least to know how much is involved in the doctrine of prayer. On the one hand, it may prevent our lightly throwing out, or taking up from others, objections which may

shake, if they do not undermine, the foundations of belief. On the other hand, it may make us appreciate more truly that Revelation from God by which our belief in Him and our confidence in the power of prayer to Him are assured: and to reflect afresh on the evidence by which that Revelation is supported, and its harmony with the deep religious instincts and convictions of mankind at large, which underlie the errors with which very commonly they have been overlaid.

And thus the way is cleared to a truer view of the ground on which ultimately rests our belief in the efficacy of prayer: viz. religious experience and religious belief. The student of nature proudly bids the theologian stand aside, and not interfere in questions with which his habits of thought and tone of mind render him incompetent to deal. The theologian may reverse the sentence, and desire the student of nature to pursue his own most valuable, most interesting inquiries, without rudely interfering with what the theologian holds and teaches as his most true, most well-founded, belief. "All truth" (it has been said most truly) "is not attainable by the same avenues." Let the natural philosopher teach on his grounds that the order of nature is fixed, and proceeds,

as far as it is observed ordinarily, according to fixed laws. Let the theologian teach equally on *his* grounds, that God does overrule the order of events in a sphere beyond the range of our view, and that in answer to man's prayer. There is room for the acceptance of both truths.

And so with regard to religious experience as confirming the doctrine of prayer. The unbeliever may reject prayer himself—may show by facts that it does not in many cases produce its direct result. Be it so. There are moral requisites to make prayer efficacious. It is one tenet of the religion which a believer holds, that the candlestick may be removed where its light is unused. One who will not pray faithfully, cannot look for answer to prayer. But, reversely, the believer may maintain that his prayer *is* answered. His religious experience may confirm the doctrine. His life may give evidence of the power of prayer, on which it is reared. Christianity—true, living Christianity—shining outwardly, realized inwardly, confirms with a special power the doctrine of Christ. Prayer, real, trustful, constant prayer, carries with it, to those who pray, and to others, so far as it can, its own experimental proof. Live to Christ, and you will never deny Him.

Live in prayer, and your experience of its power will confirm your belief.

The whole subject may well be closed in the following admirable words of Archbishop Sharp, which form part of his "Persuasive to Prayer:" —"That which constitutes the nature of man, and doth formally difference and distinguish him from all other animals, is not so much the power of *reason*, as the capacity of being *religious*. There are some footsteps of an obscure reason to be observed in many creatures besides man. But in none, except him, is there found any sense of a Deity, or disposition towards religion, or anything which looks like it. That seems to be the prerogative of mankind. God endowed men, and them only, with spirits capable of reflecting upon the Author of their being, and of making acknowledgments and performing religious worship to Him.

"So that, to worship God; to converse with Him in the exercise of devotion; to pray and give thanks for His benefits, may be truly said to be the proper office of man as man."

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